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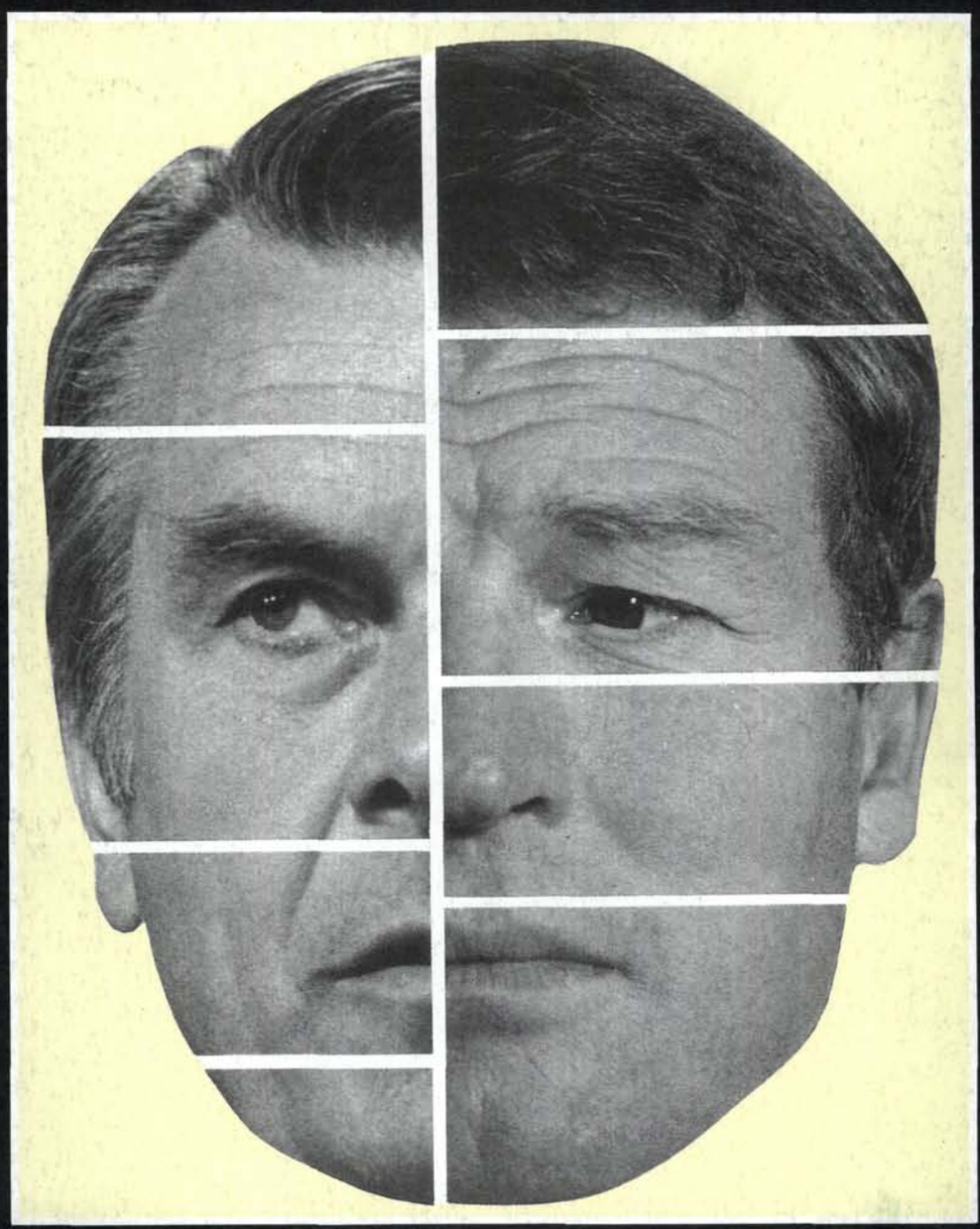

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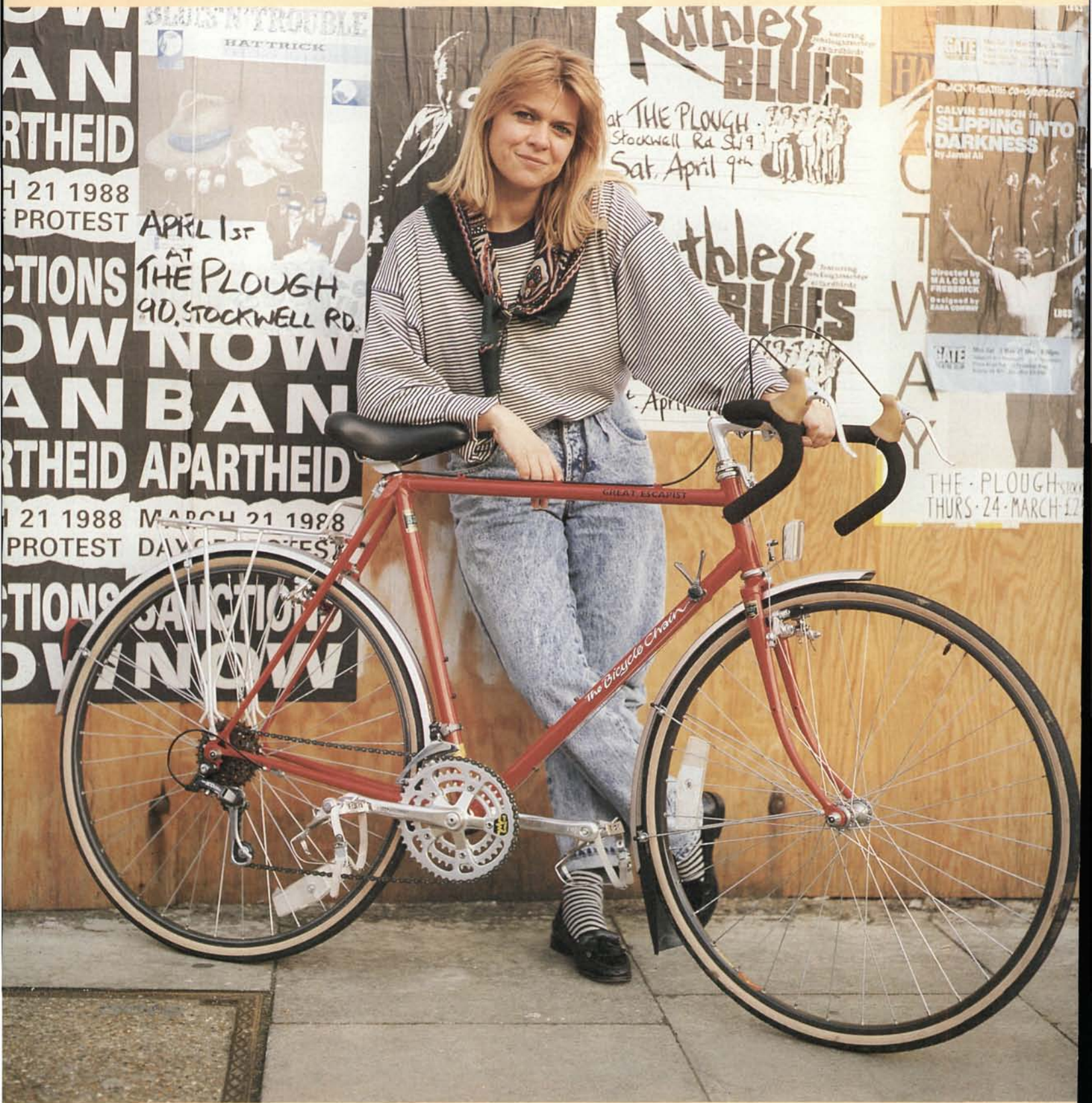

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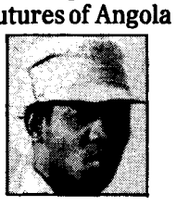

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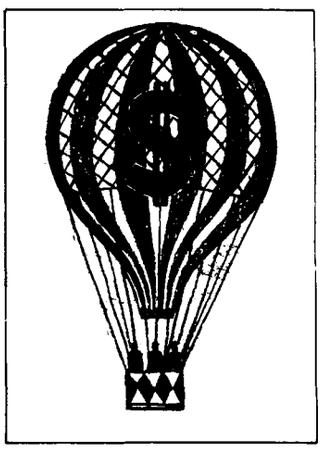

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Swingin' With The Duke

Michael Dukakis, a liberal Democratic state governor and a man little-known to most Americans until recently, holds a commanding lead in the early public opinion polls against his opponent in the November presidential election, George Bush, the Republican vice president. Ivan Boesky, the Wall Street share speculator and apostle of the 'greed is good' philosophy, has now taken up residence in a federal prison, after being convicted of insider trading. Even in the world of fashion, often a guide to shifts in public tastes, change is in the air. The head of Paul Stuart, a leading menswear emporium in Manhattan, summed it up: 'Anything that flaunts materialism is out.'

Is there a new mood emerging in the United States that portends a fundamental political shift in post-Reagan America? There is evidence that social attitudes and political views are indeed changing, with some of the signs coming from beyond the realm of politics. In the popular arts, the movie *Wall Street*, in which a venal share dealer played by Michael Douglas eventually gets his come-uppance, is one example. On the best-seller lists we find Tom Wolfe's scathing portrayal of what he describes as 'imperious excess' in his novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Their success suggests that such views are not voices from the fringes.

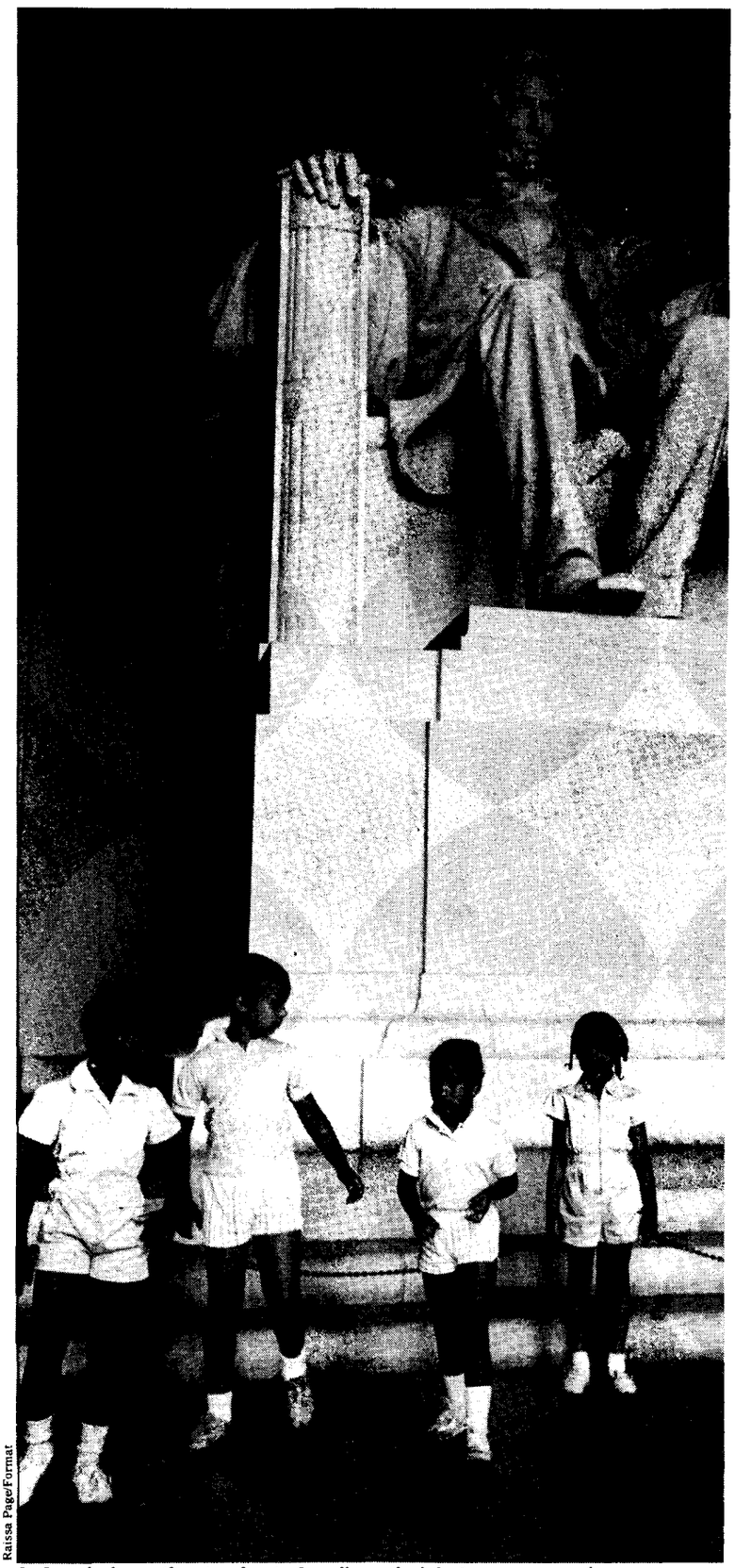
'Polls show that two out of every three Democrats who crossed over and voted for Reagan in 1984 now say they will vote for Dukakis in November'

Yet, clearly, the strongest piece of evidence to support the view that American attitudes are changing is the appeal of Dukakis. Particularly pleasing for him must be the polls showing that two out of every three Democrats who crossed over and voted for President Reagan in 1984 now say they will vote for Dukakis in November. Though the months between now and November represent a near-eternity by the standards of a frenetic American presidential campaign – an uncertain period littered with challenges and hurdles – Dukakis increasingly looks like a winner.

Part of his appeal, to be sure, is a matter of style. He is young, efficient and quick-witted. He has an appetite for facts and figures, a genuine interest in the workings of the machinery of government and intricate policy proposals. For him, serious issues are small talk. Critics say he is a boring technocrat unable to lead the American people. But to many, he seems a welcome change from the amiable bumbling of the Reagan years. As Dukakis puts it: 'We've had charisma. Now we need competence.'

On social policy, Dukakis is an advocate of 'leveraged liberalism', which means using the government as the engine to create new services, rather than paying for them outright. Massachusetts recently enacted America's first statewide health-care law. Under the new law, the cost of mandatory health insurance is shared by businesses and employees, with companies paying into a state insurance fund so the unemployed, not just jobholders, are covered. Dukakis hopes to use the state plan as a model nationally, if elected. 'Health care is a right', he says.

In foreign policy, Dukakis, a fluent Spanish speaker who briefly lived in South America, is opposed to support for the contras in Nicaragua. In truth, Reagan's Central American policy was always more popular inside the White House than elsewhere



Raissa Page/Format

Is America's youth returning to founding principles?

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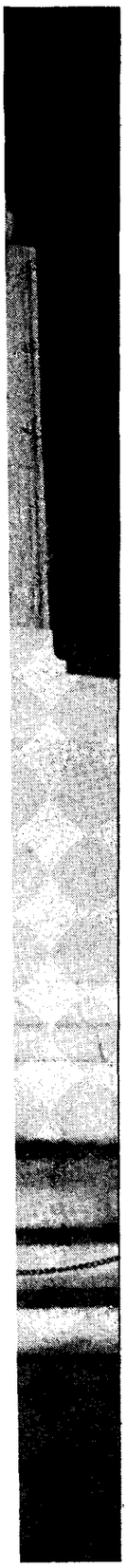


in America and mainly funded through the machinations of White House operatives as well, apparently.

Still, elections in the United States, as elsewhere, are won on the 'pocketbook' issue. Dukakis must convince voters that the American economy is in better hands with him in the White House than with Bush.

As the architect of the 'Massachusetts Miracle', Dukakis can fairly claim that he is a competent economic manager. Unemployment, which was 12% when he first became governor in 1975, the highest in any major industrial state, has dropped to 3%. State and local taxes, which had been the highest per capita in all the 50 states, are now eighth lowest. Personal income has been the fastest-growing of any state during the 1980s.

Not all of the improvements can be attributed to Dukakis' policies by any means. Without a strong regional economy, there would have been no Massachusetts miracle. But he is credited with devising innovative, low-cost programmes to stimulate growth, even in depressed inner-city areas, typically creating quasi-public agencies with both government officials and business representatives on their boards. Tax breaks have been used as an incentive to get banks and insurance companies to invest in depressed areas. To combat unemployment, Dukakis created a programme in co-operation with companies to train and find jobs for 30,000 welfare recipients since 1983.

In America, there is no debate about the market economy. That is accepted, even by Democrats to the political left of Dukakis, such as Jesse Jackson, a millionaire entrepreneur himself. Instead, the economic issue revolves around ways to make the market economy work better and work for more people. Dukakis can probably make as strong a claim as Bush on the first count and a stronger one on the second, with his brand of pragmatic liberalism for the late-1980s.●

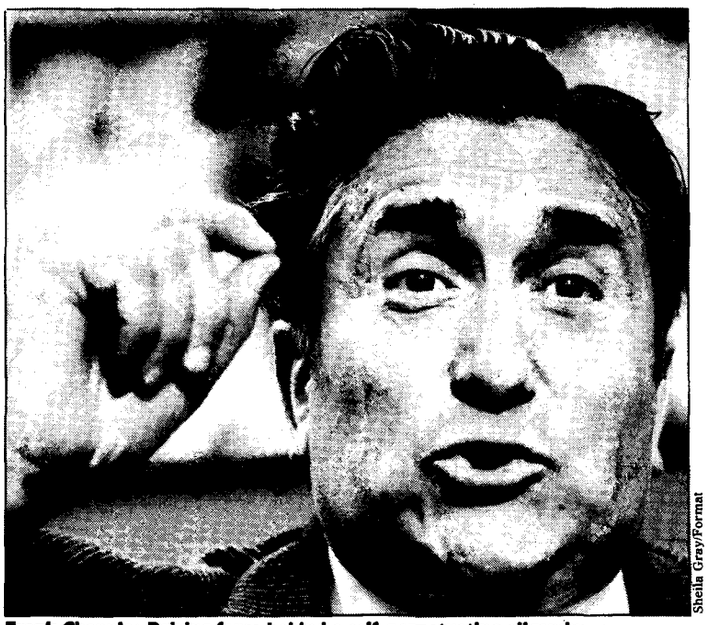
Steve Lohr

Sparking Off Trouble

The leadership of the EETPU electricians' union is universally presented as modern and forward looking. However, like no other union, the collective psychology of the leadership – a mixture of the bloody-minded bully and innocent victim of the conspiracy – stems from its past, and particularly the cold war.

Anyone trying to understand the union – and its now annual assertions of independence from the TUC General Council – needs to read *All Those In Favour*, an account of the EETPU communist corruption trial put together by CH Rolph and the former *New Statesman* editor John Freeman. The book, a condensed version of the 1961 trial, describes how Frank Haxel, Secretary, and Frank Foulkes, then President, rigged ballots in the fifties on behalf of the Communist Party to secure the election of communist leaders and thus control of policy. As John Freeman wrote in the preface: 'In years to come students of British social history may remember the case of Bryne and Chapple v Foulkes and Others in the same way as we refer today to the Taff Vale judgement and even the trial of Oscar Wilde; first for its importance in the casebook of trade union law and second for the total collapse of individual reputation with which it ended.'

The exposure of the biggest fraud in trade union history was a bruising affair. It was achieved with pertinacity and at some personal cost for men like John Byrne, the union's future general secretary. However, it allowed Chapple, a left-wing socialist, according to Freeman, but more importantly, a convert from communism, to take gradual control. Over a few years the power of the annual conference, the election of full-time officials and the district structure were whittled away.



Sheila Gray/Format

Frank Chapple: Driving force behind a self-perpetuating oligarchy

As an article of faith the union leadership came to disregard the views of activists in favour of the opinion of the moderate silent majority. That majority expressed its opinion once every five years in the elections for the general secretary and executive council. Increasingly, members of the executive did not come from the lay membership, but from the cadre of full-time officials appointed by the executive, a grooming process which inevitably led to the development of a self-perpetuating oligarchy of like-minded attitude. Most dissent, whether it was from left-wing branches, other union general secretaries or sceptics in the press, was dismissed by raising the bogey of communist conspiracy. No opposition could be taken at face value: communists or their fellow travellers lay behind all criticism. The extent to which this near-McCarthyism was a device to defeat opposition or a genuine reflection of the leadership's fears is unclear.

As a result, the EETPU became self-consciously different from other TUC affiliates, almost to the extent of being isolationist. At the top level there was a sense of the union being apart from the TUC mainstream, uniquely democratic and uniquely battle scarred, whilst on the shopfloor members showed a bullish sense of craft which had to be defended from the threat represented by the mass of unskilled workers.

With the election of Eric Hammond in succession to Chapple, the language of the cold war became increasingly redundant, but the union's willingness to face down its enemies and assert its independence remained dominant. More and more, the union's executive saw its role as some kind of far-sighted prophet derided by its contemporaries. As Hammond proudly tells his union's conference delegates: 'We are the future.' On a succession of issues – acceptance of state money for ballots, the leadership of the miners' strike, the regular election of union executives by postal ballots, the political damage caused by the London Labour Left – the electricians claim with arguable justification that their heresies have become today's orthodoxies. Such change, they believe, has only been secured by the blunt language and nerve which had always stood the leadership in good stead.

Yet at some point two or three years ago, Hammond could probably have made his peace with the TUC, as he was pressed to do, both in

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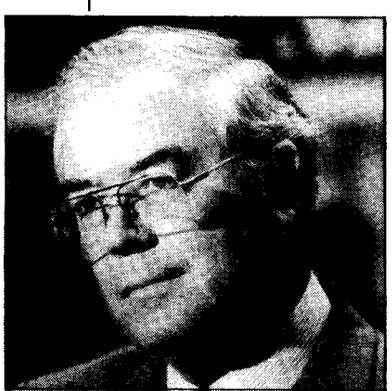
private and public. He could have accepted that the battle for new realism inside the party and the unions was largely won. As a result he could have presented the importance of strike-free deals – a mirage under British industrial relations law – far less aggressively. Similarly the union could have accepted that a common solution was required to the TUC's loss of membership and cancerous competition for single union deals caused by the emergence of four or five general unions.

However, Hammond did neither. The strike-free deal was portrayed as indispensable to the future productivity of British industry, even though most industrial relations academics do not forsee them spreading beyond a few tightly defined



Hammond: Future heretic?

industries. On inter-union competition, Hammond outlined a utopian solution that all unions should hand their members to the TUC so that they could be reorganised along industrial lines.

Probably two things stood in the way of any rapprochement. First, the union faced a drawn-out and increasingly embarrassing investigation over its role in the recruitment of labour for News International. The investigation remains unresolved. Secondly, the electricians' collective leadership, proud of its independence and its roots, has become psychologically almost incapable of compromise. Conflict in a Manichean world has been almost a way of life. ●

Patrick Wintour

Turkish Left on Trial

The present battles taking place in Turkey over the legitimacy of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party – and whether the Green Party (which has been legalised just this month) should be able to operate in national elections – are not just the normal political manoeuvrings of an indigenous bourgeoisie to stifle opposition.

They are part of the same battle being fought out in the US senate and elsewhere, with conservative fundamentalists seeing any concessions on peace and democratic rights as concessions to 'the evil empire'.

Turkey's position on the globe means that it influences both East and West. It directly borders the Soviet Union and can control the Soviet Mediterranean fleet. It borders Iraq and has influence on the Iran/Iraq conflict. It is a neighbour of Syria and a mere stone's throw away from Lebanon and Israel.

It has an interest in, and a common language with, a significant part of Cyprus and moved its troops there in order to maintain that position. It is an Asian country classified as European and it has the largest standing army in NATO.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the US gave unqualified support to President Evren's regime. Neither is it surprising that Mrs Thatcher rushed to invite Evren, the general who led the 1980 military coup, to visit Britain: or that at meetings of European leaders she so pointedly sits next to Prime Minister Turgut Ozal.

However there is another side to this battle for control over this unique country. The 1980 coup happened against the background of Turkey having one of the most developed progressive trade union confederations in any industrialised country, DISK. Even in Turk-IS, the larger and more conservative confederation, there were many progressive elements and they were growing. It is of some significance that it was the highly active women's organisation *Ilerici Kadinlar Dernegi* that had the honour of being first to be banned by the military regime.

Even today, eight years after the coup and with regime apparently safely in the riding seat, over 500 lawyers recently offered to defend Haydar Kutlu and Dr Nihat Sargin when they were arrested upon their return to Turkey to register the new United Communist Party of Turkey.

Many democratic elements still exist in Turkey. They have had to regroup and adopt new forms but the proof of their existence and the strength of their claim to represent the actual needs and wishes of the majority of the people of Turkey is shown by the Evren/Ozal regime's treatment of their representatives over the period since the coup in 1980, culminating in the current farcical trials.

The latest opinion polls in Turkey show that ANAP, the government party, now lies third and could not win an election. With inflation at 70%, foreign debts at $45m and 25% unemployment, Turgut Ozal and President Evren are putting their faith in taking Turkey into the EC.

Yet with the arrest, torture and trial of Communist leaders Haydar Kutlu and Dr Nihat Sargin, human rights association leaders Sandalci and Zarakolu (also on trial for petitioning for abolition of the death penalty and amnesty for political prisoners); and with hundreds of journalists (541 in 1987) being charged every year, it is hard to see the EC accepting Turkey's membership. The regime's situation is so desperate that President Evren in May talked about the possible need for another coup.

The tide, at no small cost, is turning. ●

Cam Matheson

Beyond Jam And Jerusalem

A 'pillar of society' is how the National Federation of Women's Institutes was recently described by another of that kind, BBC Radio Four. The WIs' Annual General Meeting, held in London's Albert Hall in May, certainly conveys the impression of middle England in class, age and dress.

But it would be a mistake to regard this band as henchwomen for Thatcherism. In the last few years the WIs have very slowly moved away from their image of behatted ladies in the shires, discussing jam and singing *Jerusalem*.

Since 1971 the Federation has been able to discuss political matters: 'Provided of course it is done in an apolitical way' says WIs' chair*man* Agnes Salter. Such matters aren't limited to issues concerning women and children only – a restriction placed on the Women's TUC until very recently.

Although the AGM is not a riproaring decision-making gathering – delegates are mandated in advance by their branches on how to vote – the discussion gives some hint of the debate that takes place at the grassroots. The speeches this year on the ozone layer pointed to women's power as a consumer lobby in forcing manufacturers to abandon the use of chlorofluorocarbons. The debate on rape sentencing displayed a concern that 'all females are potential preys' and that 'no man, however learned, can possibly imagine the horror inflicted upon women in rape', in the words of Jean Entwhistle of Sefton.

There were some political subtexts too: the wish to affirm the role of parish councils because of concern about the impact of the poll tax; the debate on water pollution revealing the government's intent to lower standards as part of privatisation.

The Federation is now reviewing its 75-year old constitution (described as 'authoritarian' by Salter) in order to halt its membership decline and to reach the 'magic half million'. ●

Brenda Kirsch

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Occupational burden: Unita soldier on patrol in southern Angola

In The Buffer Zone

A deadline of September 22 has now been set for a peace settlement in south-western Africa, involving the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and of South Africa's occupying forces from Namibia, and bringing Namibia to independence under UN Resolution 435.

That, at least, is the date proposed by Washington. By no coincidence, the US presidential campaign will then be in full swing. It thus places American priorities in the talks within a clearly domestic political context. So it would not be too surprising if the other main parties to the negotiations – Pretoria, Luanda and Havana – saw no special reason to slot into such a rapid timetable to sign, seal and start to deliver on peace for the region.

Nevertheless it seems conditions may now exist for a breakthrough, which, if it were finally to be achieved, would comprehensively restructure the whole setting for the battle for South Africa itself.

The result of an early deal would be that Namibia would be effectively neutralised as a potential base for anti-apartheid action, and especially for any ANC military presence. US officials openly if unattributably proclaim Pretoria will have the right to punitive, 'hot-pursuit' operations into post-independence Namibia. Further secret financial and military guarantees for Pretoria may well lie on the table, or at least under it.

To put it bluntly, at a Lancaster House-style independence conference, Swapo would be in no strong position to resist highly restrictive provisions which are likely to be sought by the US, West Germany, Canada, France and Britain, the original sponsors in 1978 of UN Resolution 435 under which Namibia was supposed to reach independence within 12 months.

Such provisions could include some or all of the following: clauses effectively preventing a Swapo government taking measures to wrest the economy from Pretoria's grip, ensuring continued (and finally legal) Western exploitation of its rich deposits of uranium and hydrocarbons, entrenching constitutional rights for Namibia's white farmers, and allowing continued South African occupation of the Walvis Bay naval enclave. Almost certainly the West would seek an effective demilitarisation of Namibia, whereby no foreign military forces (and especially not Cubans) would be allowed on its soil, and the development of a carefully controlled new Namibian army.

This is precisely the sort of solution that the US has been pursuing under Reagan and Chester Crocker, the US under-secretary of state for southern Africa and one of the few senior Reagan officials to have survived throughout the presidency.

On the other side, a South African withdrawal from both southern Angola and Namibia has long been viewed by both Angola and Cuba as the essential condition that must be met if Angola is to enjoy guaranteed 'sovereignity and territorial integrity'. Such a withdrawal would deprive Pretoria's clients in the Unita movement of their crucial sources of logistical support, and Angola will be in a position, at long last, to try to rebuild its shattered economy.

What has changed to break the deadlock? The first and most important factor is Mikhail Gorbachev. Without his signature, a UN-sponsored settlement cannot be achieved. With his agreement, anything is possible.

It is difficult to imagine that UN-supervised elections would fail to return a Swapo government. Even a heavily compromised independence would, arguably, be better for Namibia than the present situation of outright and seemingly unending occupation by the forces of apartheid. Certainly such a settlement would be a huge relief

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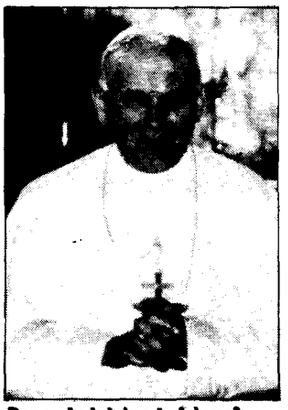
to Angola. Such may be among the calculations motivating Moscow.

The second factor is military. Since last October, when the South Africans mounted a major offensive to install themselves and Unita in the strategic southern town of Cuito Cuanavale, an unprecedented counter-offensive by the Cubans and Angolans has now brought them to within a few miles of the Namibian border, where a powerfully defended airfield is being constructed that will presumably end South Africa's previously uncontested control of the local skies.

And whereas before Chester Crocker's policy of 'linkage' effectively legitimised South African occupation of both Namibia and the southern reaches of Angola by equating this to the 40,000-strong Cuban troop presence in Angola; now that Havana, Luanda and Moscow appear to be open to the idea of a trade-off, Pretoria is coming under growing US pressure to fall into line with a scheme which is designed, after all, to enhance its own long-term security.

As the diplomatic haggling proceeds the obstinacy of the apartheid regime may derail the process at any time. But it just may happen that circumstances conspire to give Washington a major foreign policy success that, while depressing for all those whose minds are concentrated exclusively on the goal of overthrowing apartheid, still ultimately represents a consolidation for the progressive forces of the region. ●

Noll Scott



Pope: Indulging Lefebvre?

The Pope's Prodigal

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) brought the Catholic church into the 20th century and opened up the possibilities of a dialogue with 'all people of good will'. The leader of the minority – less than 10% of the bishops – was the French archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre, who refused to accept the Council's decisions, especially those concerning worship in the vernacular.

His theory varied somewhat, but essentially he saw in Vatican II the invasion of the church by the values of the French Revolution. Liberty was echoed in the declaration on religious freedom; equality in the way the papal 'monarchy' was set in the context of a team made up of all the world's bishops; and fraternity was expressed in an ecumenism which took other Christians, other religions and other beliefs seriously. Lefebvre was suspended in 1976 by Pope Paul VI.

It now looks as though he may be reconciled before he dies. He is 83, and has been contemplating ordaining another bishop to succeed him as head of his dissident organisation headquartered at Econe in Switzerland. That would mean the final break, or schism, and Lefebvre would have to be excommunicated. Some think this would clear the air.

But Pope John Paul II now seems inordinately anxious to arrange some sort of truce with Lefebvre before he dies. The signal this would send to the rest of the church is ominous. It would mean the reward of dissent, and would give some credence to the view of right-wing Catholics that Vatican II was all a big mistake. The only people who would rejoice are the followers of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, many of whom also support Lefebvre. The deadline for a decision, originally June 29, has now been moved to August 15. ●

Peter Hebblethwaite

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Aneurin Bevan addressing the 1948 AGM of the Royal College of Nursing.

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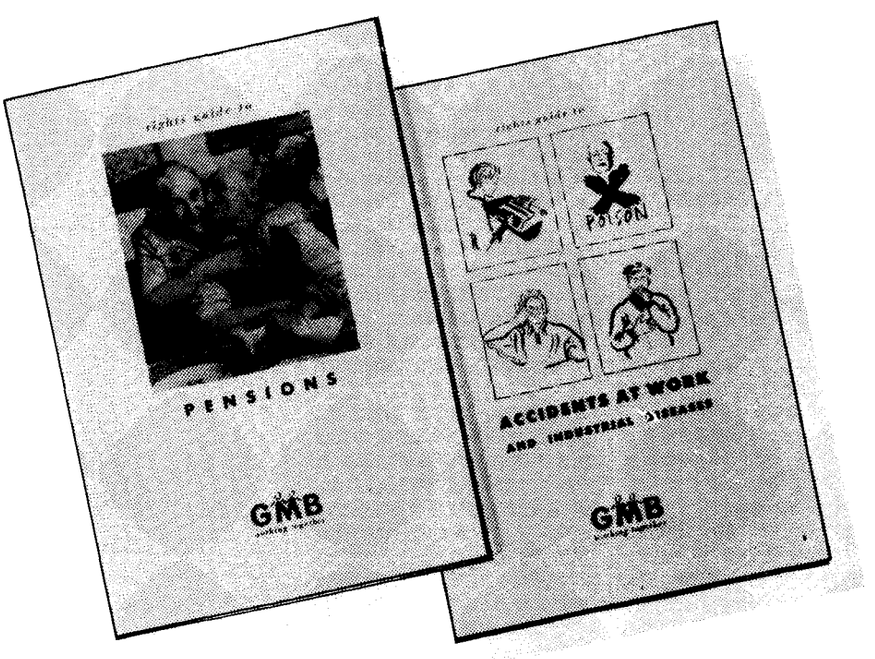

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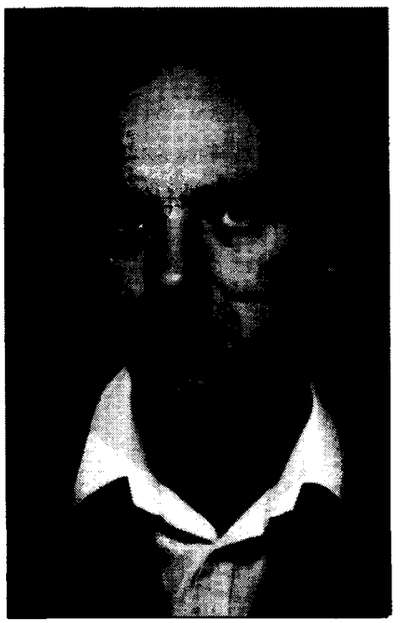

Swindon, This Is Swindon

From a model example of post-Fordist economic growth, John Green looks at how life in Swindon is adjusting.

Many people think that Swindon's (qualified) economic success is a very recent phenomenon, spawned by Thatcherism. Not so. It was perceived many years ago that Swindon was becoming over-reliant on 'Fordist' industries, large labour-intensive units which were vulnerable to advancing technology and foreign competition.

'It's a fact that new technology does provide better working conditions – albeit for fewer workers'

Labour's hyper-inflation of the mid-70s and Thatcher's assault on manufacturing in the early 80s gave greater urgency to the local Labour council's efforts to transform Swindon's economic base into a more diverse one, thereby accelerating a process which was already well underway, given the impact the new technology and Swindon's strategic importance to it.

The attractions of Swindon (especially to hi-tech, communications and commercial companies) were obvious – its central location, the M4 and railway link, easy access to Heathrow, a skilled labour force, room for expansion, cheap business rates and housing in relation to south-east prices. Another 'attraction' may well have been Swindon's lack of trade union militancy, which was sadly reflected in the closure of the railworks.

In its heyday the works imployed 14,000 people. Swindon was built around it and the local economy sustained by it for well over a century. It closed in 1986 not with a bang but a whimper. The 'fight' to save it was tokenistic. It had been run down for years, and most workers had long reconciled themselves to closure. More than a few accepted redundancy money eagerly.

Fears about the closure (which I shared) proved to be greatly exaggerated. Two years on some 90% of the 2,300 made redundant have been absorbed back into the local economy. One has even become council leader, and you can't get any more absorbed than that! Some ex-railworkers still tell you that they actually prefer their new working environment.

One – an electrician – told me recently: 'My new job is cleaner, safer, more rewarding and better paid. I wouldn't go back in the railworks at any price.' It's a fact that new technology does provide better working conditions – albeit for fewer workers. There's a painful lesson here for those socialists with a romanticised view of production and the working class.

If Swindon's 'boom' has (so far) been sustained, the full social impact of it was not forseen or, if it was, it cannot easily be righted. There is much concern among the (generally less affluent) indigenous population – particularly first-time buyers – over house prices reaching absurd levels, not least due to the large influx of incoming workers in recent years. Swindon is also something of a dormitory town for London and Home Counties high-flyers and a target for speculative buyers. The proliferation of estate agents, whose garish boards litter the streets, is something to behold.

John Betjeman once said that Swindon had 'very little architecture and a great deal of building'. That's still the case, only on a much larger scale. Many older residents feel Swindon has become too big and is no longer a town they can identify with. It is two separate communities co-existing with each other but rarely coming into contact – the 'yuppies' (not all outsiders of course) are for the most part cocooned in their designer homes, company cars, offices and trendy pubs and restaurants. There's little social interplay between them and the rest of us.

Another – more practical – reason for curbing physical growth is our inadequate road infrastructure. Swindon has arguably the worst road and traffic management system of any comparable town. The smallish shopping centre (the retail sector has lagged behind) is now flanked by office blocks to and from which thousands of drivers stutter along congested roads. Parking spaces are scarce and fiercely contested.

It's now widely recognised that we should pause for breath and consolidate what we have. People are asking: Is such rapid growth desirable? More to the point, and here's the sting: is it controllable? The council was recently powerless to prevent or dictate the terms of a 10,000 home development which will stretch the infrastructure – not just roads but public services – to breaking point. Can we really curb physical growth without risking economic stagnation? Somehow we must, for the developers are running amok.

In earlier years the council could better regulate growth through large-scale land ownership and real planning powers. Yet, side by side with recent growth has been the Tory attack on local government – the erosion of planning powers in general, and big cuts in grants and 'ratecapping' for this borough in particular.

A debate is now going on as to where scarce civic funds are best directed. Attempts are being made to confer upon the run-down central area a beleagured inner-city status. It and other older areas are competing for resources with the large council estates on the periphery of the town. The 'western expansion' area (where many of the incoming workers live) enjoys a positive glut of social and leisure facilities.

'The town is two separate communities co-existing, but rarely coming into contact with each other'

In contrast, these council estates were in the main poorly and hastily built and ill-served with facilities. Here can be found the bulk of those bypassed by the 'boom', those less willing or able to compete, in part through their skills shortage. For many of these people the struggle to survive is all-consuming, an end in itself. Powerlessness and unrelenting poverty can lead to a poverty of *mind* which is no less debilitating.

This is the *other* Swindon, the one you don't read about in the 'quality' papers which extol only its virtues. The council made an accommodation with technology and sold it well: both to our advantage and – as we have seen – to our cost.

Swindon highlights the problems that rapid growth can bring in its wake. It serves as an example of capitalism's ability to reproduce itself through technology, but equally of technology's limitations under capitalism. After all, the poor are still here. ●

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LETTERS

Blueprint For Socialist Society

It is brave of Pat Devine to kick off *Marxism Today*'s long overdue blueprint-for-a-socialist-society season, with 'Market Mania Of The Left' (*MT* June).

Real life failures both of Soviet command planning and market socialism *à la* Hungary and Yugoslavia, have given Pat's offering both a purchase on the problem and a perspective.

As such, it's a fairly concrete speculation, although it perhaps suffers from its provenance in – or reaction from – Eastern bloc experience. It seems to us, with very different experience and prospects, a bit like the yokel's advice that to reach our destination we ought to start from somewhere else. Maybe the book on which the article is based carries more conviction.

Socialists certainly need a convincing model: one that is both socialist and credible. By socialist, I mean where society's resources are deployed democratically – although democracy may decree that for convenience, practicability or efficiency, certain consumer needs might be more rationally left to market mechanisms, providing the problems that this entails can be contained.

Pat's offering may be premature. The challenge of the Thatcherite philosophy of human nature and its motivations are not addressed. Are these topics irrelevant, or have they been 'solved' by the Left?

We have not assimilated the insights of Richard Dawkins, as expressed in *The Selfish Gene*. These insights are not a prescription for social darwinism, but they certainly have implications for the kind of 'human nature' we have legislated for in the past. Thatcher claims that there is no society, only individuals and the family; and that Tory policies are more consistent with 'human nature'. Marxists used to be very good on 'human nature', which is what economic systems have to work on.

It's also worrying that Pat does not feel it necessary to relate his model to the social need for technological innovation – a serious shortcoming of command planning. Would 'co-ordinated negotiation' do the trick? He makes no mention of the revolution in capitalist manufacturing, with its new managerial/technological standards of efficiency. From Just-In-Time (JIT), through Flexible Manufacturing Systems (FMS), to Computer Integrated Manufacture (CIM), manufacture is being pushed to the boundaries of rationality.

And, more importantly, none of these innovations function without workforce commitment well beyond the potential of conventional confrontational industrial relations. Such commitment not only commands a material price, but would seem likely to generate a shift in workforce consciousness of its role.

All of this may be just incidental to Pat's main theme, but it needs to be talked though. ●
Harry Challis, Shropshire

Aficiando Of The British State

It's a pity that Tom Nairn's otherwise excellent article, 'Tartan And Blue' (*MT* June), made no attempt to analyse the influence of the Communist Party on Scottish politics over the last 25 years.

From the unionist assertions pervading the *British Road To Socialism*, to the presumably conscious incorporation of imperialist assumptions into its title, the Communist Party of Great Britain remained every inch an aficionado of the British state, a position those of us on the nationalist Left would argue is the very antithesis of the serious possibility of permanent progress, and a core cause of the Communist Party's postwar electoral failures.

Worst of all, the party's unionism appears to have been principled, as its senior members have never had a serious possibility of high office within the British system.

Today, the possibility of independent Scottish membership of the European Community renders the British union redundant, and belief in it requires an act of faith. It remains to be seen whether the Communist Party is as agnostic as it now claims to be, or whether the true church still subsists there as virulently as it does on the Right. ●
Alan Clayton, Renfrewshire

Sexual Politics

During the roundtable discussion of Clause 28 (*MT* June) the important question was raised of how the attack on the 'promotion of homosexuality' fits into the overall political agenda of Thatcherism.

Since last year's Conservative victory, we have seen Clause 28, plans for the Broadcasting Standards Council, the Alton Bill and a number of pronouncements on morality from government ministers.

But if there is a calculated government strategy, why did Thatcher oppose the Alton Bill, why is the government clashing with moral groups over the Aids campaign and divorce, and why did it fail to support the forerunners of Clause 28 before the general election?

Clause 28 is attractive to its supporters on several counts: it presents the government as defending the family, childhood innocence and heterosexuality, it causes problems for the Labour Party, it accords with the prime minister's own moralist predilections. But as Victoria Gillick or Tory anti-abortionists or the Conservative Family Campaign can testify, although the Thatcher government is sometimes to be found alongside the 'moral Right', it still in the main has quite different priorities. ●
Martin Durham, Birmingham

Jokey Titles

The choice of titles for Cynthia Cockburn's article (*MT* April) and Sioned-Mair Richard's reply (*MT* May) – 'Macho Men Of The Left' and 'Dated Feminism' – are slightly jokey and peripheral to 'real politics'.

I understand the article to be about the pervasiveness of gender power relationships and it raises questions for men and women on ways of integrating the gender issue into the left agenda. I saw it as a serious contribution to *MT*'s current debate on 'rethinking socialism'. However, *MT*'s choice of the title, and cover illustration too, invites men who do not see themselves, and perhaps really are not, personally macho to think the article is not relevant to them.

Marxism Today makes an effort these days to get articles from women and about feminism. But titles like these marginalise the issue. Does *MT* really see feminism as central to the socialist project? ●
Heather Hunt, London

Consumerism

The recent article by Mort and Green on consumerism (*MT* May), whilst hinting at the problems – the hundreds swamped by credit card bills with a second mortgage etc, – showed no insight into the debilitating effects of consumerism as a process, even for those who are 'successful' within it.

The role of consumer is ultimately a passive one. This does not mean that we are all blank slates to be written on by advertisers, merely that in the process of consumption the consumer is on the weak side of an inherently asymmetrical power relationship.

There may be nothing innately Thatcherite about shopping and consumption but there is something innately, indeed supremely, capitalist about the culture of consumption. This is as true for 'lifestyle' shopping as it is for food shopping. In fact the former is possibly even more debilitating than the reliance on a 'free market' for one's foodstuffs and the acute ontological insecurity that can pose.

Not only because in order for the whole edifice to keep functioning, lifestyles, like cars, will wear out (otherwise who would be the new models?), but basically because it involves the use of role models, the acceptance of archetypes (of objects as well as people) and giving away the power of deciding these types to others.

The *real* challenge for the Left is not to design and market 'alternative' lifestyles and so substitute one form of relative passivity for another, but to break the cycle and allow people to gain power over these matters for themselves. ●
Clive Hedges, Milton Keynes

Liberalism

R Ward's suggestion (*MT* June) that the Left should 'construct an idea of individuality which incorporates a tolerance of difference' will come as no great revelation to those of us who feel we already occupy the radical ground in British politics.

We call it Liberalism. ●
Stanley Jackson, Surrey

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LETTERS

Historical Paradigm

In response to Robin Wilson (*MT* May), the Irish have a special contribution to make in the context of what seems to be emerging as a 'historical paradigm' which relates also to South Africa and Palestine.

The common ground between them is a colonial settler population imposing itself as a ruling elite over an aboriginal population which it has displaced by force from possession of the land.

In those cases where a political solution has been achieved without partition, nations have begun to emerge in which the skills and cultures of the disparate ethnic groups are in the process of merging creatively, with significant numbers of ex-colonists 'sticking it out'. In the partitionist case, whether labelled 'Israel', 'Ulster' or 'apartheid', there is no avoiding institutionalised violence by a ruling elite.

The contemporary Irish situation is mild compared to South Africa and Palestine, but there are many parallels. At the core of the problem is the definition of 'the state' in terms of priority access to services for an elite group, whether Protestants, Jews or whites. A state which so defines itself, and which restricts access by out-groups to full citizenship, is the root source of violence.

The Irish Protestant community would be happy to participate in building a new Irish national, in the mainstream tradition of European national democracy, given a bit of encouragement from Britain. The history of the Irish nation-building process, needs to be completed within a political framework which helps rather than hinders this process; one which is community-based.

The political expedient represented by the Anglo-Irish Agreement is the very antithesis of the type of cantonal confederal approach which I am suggesting is essential. Seen from the view of Northern Protestants, is a conspiracy of two remote imperial state machines, in London and in Dublin, to rule them without political feedback. No wonder it doesn't work. ●

Roy H W Johnston, Dublin

English Nationalism

Robin Wilson (*MT* May) claims that 'nationalism itself is not unambiguously progressive, entertaining as it does clericalist and militarist elements, and even Thatcherite Britain is a more secular and modern society, with a much larger progressive constituency than is the Republic'.

'Modern' in this context is surely a euphemism for 'affluent'. While the working populations of Britain are more affluent than those of Ireland, access to basic social security for many women, pensioners and the poor generally, has been systematically eroded by Mrs Thatcher's government's policies. In particular, the introduction of the social fund makes it extremely difficult for single working-class women to cover the costs of maintaining dependants.

It is a society that remains within the grip of antiquated militarist state structures which are given a regular polish by Mrs Thatcher's brand of English nationalism.

The apparatuses of injustice operate at all levels throughout British society. Recent events in Gibralter demonstrate that the British state is less concerned with justice than to convince the public that British national security is infallible.

This illusion shifts public attention away from the processes of fragmentation within British society, to disruption which is portrayed as imposed from 'outside'. Thus 'Irish nationalism' becomes the problem to focus upon and analyse, rather than the crisis brought about by the challenge to English national ascendancy.

The problem here is not just about how Irish democracy, unification and autonomy are going to be achieved, but how a British state free of colonial attachments is going to relinquish dependence upon a nationalism that entertains militarist, chauvinist and medieval ritual elements.

Gender is also important since it is primarily the sons of British working-class women who are patrolling the streets of Northern Ireland. With the erosion of social security benefits in this country such women have a great deal in common with working-class women in Belfast and other parts of Ireland. How many children born to these women today will be patrolling the streets of West Belfast in the year 2008? ●

K M McMullen, Brighton

Global Interdependence

Fred Halliday may be underestimating the ideological influences, including morality, in his assessment of confrontation between the two superpowers (*MT* June).

The favoured Soviet goal of global interdependence raises fresh hopes that the parity between them can, over a fairly short time span, be transformed so as to include very substantial disarmament and make progress towards a fair North-South relationship.

This perspective should appeal worldwide and cannot exclude the reality of social change. The symbolism of confrontation is now crumbling and new motivations will become ongoing. A new realistic approach can be expected to follow, given a campaigning spirit and movement.

Nation states other than the two superpowers must have an enormous amount to gain, broadly speaking, from a greatly-relaxed international situation, and can be calculated as using their bargaining powers to the detriment of opponents of a new and more sensible international order. ●

Chris Rubinsten, Hants

Hamsters For Socialism

My wife and I met an interesting chap in the pub recently. He certainly opened our eyes to a thing or two, because we'd always thought marxism was something upsetting the Labour Party (who we've always voted for).

On the way back from the DHSS today I popped into Smiths to get my *Sporting Life* and saw your magazine on the top shelf. I splashed out on a copy and must say I find it interesting. It's certainly opened my eyes to a thing or two. Now I know it's wrong to blame socialists for wrecking the Labour Party.

If I was rich enough, I'd become a socialist too. I'd buy a mountain bike (£950) and go on holiday to Siberia (from only £545). I could get a crash helmet for my bike for £29 and invest spare cash 'ethically'. It was particularly good to see a holiday near the sea advertised which welcomes 'vegetarians and hamsters' because this has always been a problem in the past. I'd celebrate a 'Socialist Safe Sex Summer' by sending *MT* £5 for two packs of condoms and a free T-shirt advertising Red Stripe rubbers. There are a lot of interesting concerts and so forth I'd go to.

I don't suppose I'll ever have the money though, or even have a job. Blame me if you like. I know now what a fool I've been voting Labour all these years. I'll vote for the party that gives me some hope next time round. And I'll tell all my mates in the pub tonight that they should become socialists too. ●

Adrian Bailey, Liverpool

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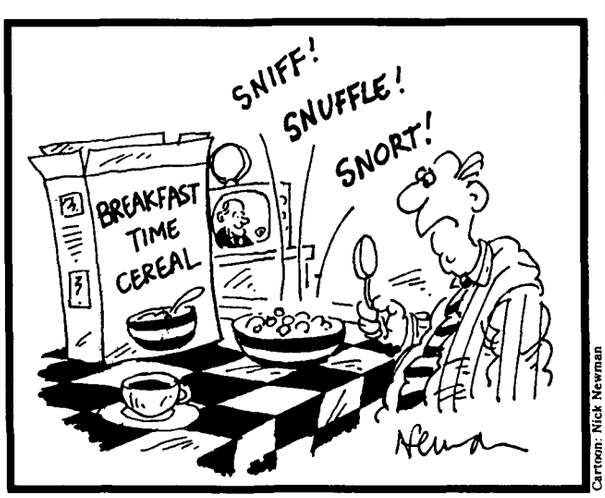

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Spot The Radical

Labour thinks the Centre will go away, but it won't. Likewise the Centre wrongly thinks that somehow Labour will go away. **David Marquand** spells out what a successful anti-Thatcherite force must look like

In normal times, the combination of myth, tradition and self-deception which prevents the opposition parties from making common cause would pose no threat to the values for which they stand. They would have leisure to regroup and rethink: and they could safely leave it to the slow processes of cultural and social change to determine how and when a new left-of-centre majority might emerge.

But, of course, the times are dangerously abnormal. In nine years, the Thatcherite crusaders have redrawn the social and political map of Britain far more thoroughly than most anti-Thatcherites thought possible in 1979. The postwar mixed economy has been largely dismantled. The postwar welfare state barely survives. The principles they embodied have been systematically rubbished – to such effect that, in his last budget, Nigel Lawson felt able to abandon the basic commitment to progressive taxation, now nearly a century old. Most ominously of all, most of the intermediate institutions which stand between the state and the citizen, and which embody and transmit alternative values, have either been rendered ineffectual, like the local authorities, or ruthlessly harried and intimidated, like the trade unions, the universities and the BBC.

This does not mean that the crusaders will achieve all their purposes. Their market-liberal faith rests on a twisted conception of human nature and human possibilities. As some of Mrs Thatcher's ministers have recently begun to recall, men and women are not Benthamite calculating machines, responsive only to the sticks and carrots of the market or the commands and prohibitions of the state. An ideology which assumes that they are must, sooner or later, go adrift. Britain will not, in the end, be remade in the image of the thrusting yuppies of the foreign exchange market, any more than Russia was remade in the image of the Heroes of Socialist Labour.

But the fact that the Thatcherites cannot attain their squalid Holy Land will not prevent them from dragging the rest of us a long way towards it. They have already pushed the authoritarian potentialities immanent in the doctrine of absolute parliamentary sovereignty further and harder than any previous peacetime government has done. By the next election, they will have pushed them further; and if they win then, they will push them further still. The last nine years have shown how easily a government of zealots, suffused with the arrogance of office, can neuter opposition. How much opposition will be left when that government has enjoyed 16 years of uninterrupted power? The forms of democracy will survive. But what will happen to the flow of criticism and dissent without which the substance atrophies?

Analysis of the Centre's complex and paradoxical position in British politics should begin at this point. After all, Labour and the Democrats together easily outnumber the Conservatives. If the votes which went to the Alliance in the last election could be added to the votes which went to Labour, the nightmare of another Thatcherite government would be averted. Yet no one has so far managed to construct an electoral coalition of that sort and no one seems likely to do so in the near future. One of the chief reasons is that part of the Centre, at any rate, is no longer conventionally centrist in assumption or aspiration, while part of the Left is not, in most of the familiar senses of the phrase, genuinely on the Left; and that, because of this, the familiar language of Right, Left and Centre now confuses at least as much as it illuminates.

That language dates, of course, from the French Revolution. It is also impregnated, however, with assumptions ultimately deriving from the Industrial Revolution. One of the legacies of the first is that the Left is supposed to be the party of the Revolution and the Right of Reaction; that the Left stands for movement and the future, and the Right for order and the past. Thanks to the second, the Left is also supposed to be the party of the exploited – by definition, the proletariat – and the Right of the exploiters, by definition the bourgeoisie.

Implicit in the whole terminology of Right, Centre and Left, are three crucial assumptions. The first is that the 'Left' is in favour of change and the 'Right' against it. The second is that change – radical and far-reaching change – is inherently 'progressive', emancipatory and anti-exploitative, to be welcomed by the dispossessed, and feared by their dispossessors. And although this is less obvious, a further implication is that the 'Centre' is, in some sense, uncertain, pusillanimous or two-faced – in favour of trivial changes, perhaps, but not of fundamental ones; sympathetic towards the exploited, but unwilling to make war on the exploiters.

All these assumptions have now broken down. Since the middle 1970s, Britain has been caught in the backwash of two overlapping crises. The first is a worldwide 'Kondratiev' crisis of rapid technological change and lagging societal adaptation. Its origins lie in the inability of institutions and practices shaped by the imperatives of old-style 'Fordist' mass production to cope, on the one hand, with the growth of flexible specialisation, small-batch production and knowledge-intensive processes and, on the other, with globalised markets and global companies. The second is a peculiarly British crisis of legitimacy and governability. Behind this lies the inability of the traditional institutions of the British state to halt a century of relative economic decline, while at the same time operating a mixed economy,

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dependent on public intervention and therefore on an ethic of public purpose.

This double crisis has shattered the old political categories and the assumptions embedded in them. It no longer makes sense to assume that the Left is for change, the Right against it and the Centre undecided. By a terrible irony, the most radical, change-welcoming and change-promoting tendency is Thatcherism. It is a moot point whether the most conservative, change-fearing and change-opposing is the Militant hard Left, what remains of the old-fashioned, blue-collar Labour Right or the equally demoralised remnants of traditional, *noblesse-oblige* Tory paternalism.

What is true of ideas is equally true of interests. The unionised, heavy-industry, manual working class, locked into the old technologies and the mind-set they engendered, can only lose from the disappearance of the 'Fordist' order of the past. Alongside it on the conservative side of the barricades is the growing underclass of the handicapped and unskilled – the late 20th century equivalent of the undeserving poor who haunted the imaginations of respectable Victorians. Equally, if less blatantly, conservative in interest is the old-established, upper-middle-class, public-sector professional salariat, which used to manage the now diminished institutions of the postwar settlement. Ranged against all of these, on the radical side of the divide, is a motley army of, among others, small builders, millionaire stockbrokers, health-insurance salesmen, garage mechanics, whole-food restaurateurs, software designers, desk-top publishers, property dealers, council-house purchasers, electricians, makers of garden furniture and members of workers' co-operatives.

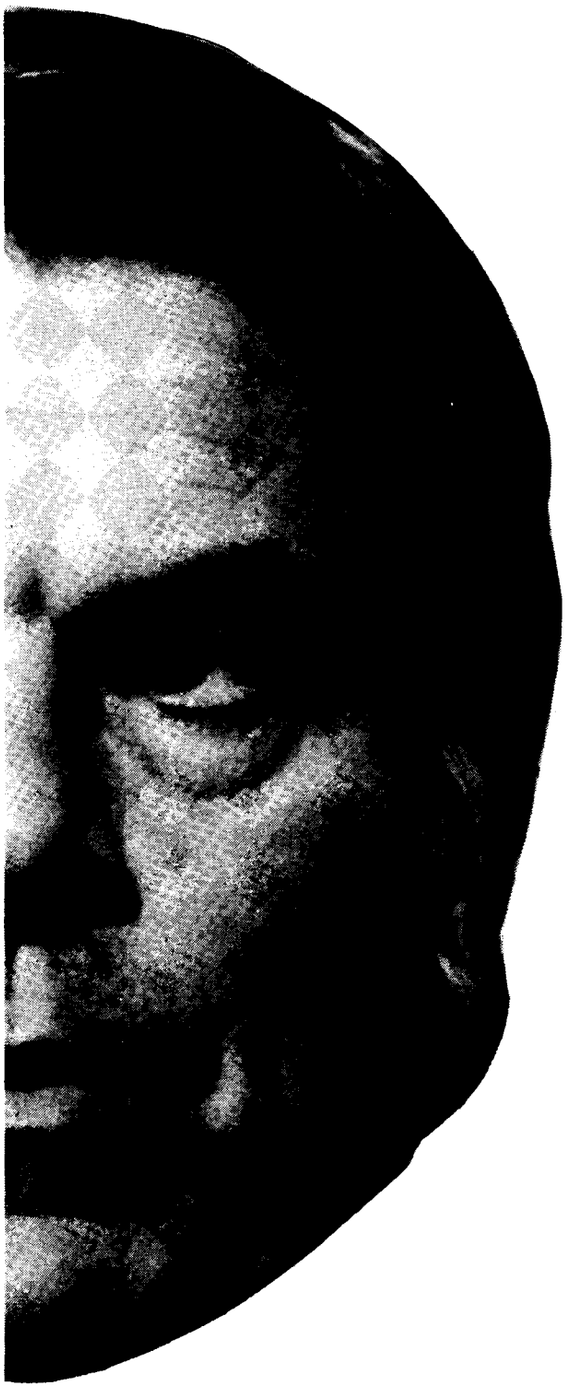
If we are to pick our way through the confusion, and make sense of the way in which the double crisis of the 1970s and 1980s has impacted on our politics, we must, as a first step, supplement the categories of 'Right', 'Centre' and 'Left' with the categories 'conservative' and 'radical'. Thatcherism then emerges as a radical Right response to the crisis, combining a strange kind of British Gaullism with a most un-Gaullist neo-liberal economic ideology, an almost Jacobin willingness to engage in top-down cultural engineering and a populist contempt for old elites.

The opposition to Thatcherism is, however, divided against itself – obviously by party and ideology, but much more importantly by mood, assumption, instinct and approach. Parts of what is conventionally classified as the Centre offer radical left responses – notably, though not exclusively, the community politics wing of the pre-merger Liberal Party, in many ways the closest British equivalent to the West German Greens. Sections of the Labour 'soft Left', most of the Greens themselves, parts of the feminist movement, sections of the Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties and some of the socialist groupings outside the Labour Party also belong in the radical column. David Owen's social market is a sort of sub-Thatcherite sub-radicalism. On the other hand, 'wet' Toryism, Croslandite revisionism, clause-four state socialism and, most obviously of all, traditional, mainstream labourism are quintessentially conservative.

Against that background, the confusions and uncertainties of the anti-Thatcher oppositions begin to fall into place. There is no truth in the notion that Thatcherism is, by definition, unstoppable – the wave of the future, which we must all ride or drown. It is, at most, a wave of one possible future. But although it can, in principle, be beaten, it will not be beaten simply by adding together all the votes of all its opponents, and trying to procure some quick fix through which they will all be delivered to the same camp on election day.

A successful anti-Thatcher coalition would have to include conservative interests and tendencies as well as radical ones – British equivalents of Walter Mondale's constituency as well as of Dukakis', of the PCF as well as of the Rocardian French Socialists. But, as those parallels imply, it would have to be radical-led and inspired. With all their faults, the bleak, demeaning doctrines of the new Right do at least address the issues of the 1980s and 1990s. Its solution to Britain's double crisis may be riddled with contradictions, but it can propose a solution. The conservatives in the anti-Thatcher camp – whether of the conventional Left or of the conventional Right – cannot. And, if the last 15 years of British history have any single lesson, it is that even bad solutions will prevail against an intellectual vacuum.

The question that really matters, then, is not how to assemble an anti-Thatcher coalition. It is how to assemble an anti-Thatcher coalition capable of offering a convincing radical alternative to the radicalism of the Right, while at the same time appealing to non-radical interests and opinions. Seventy years of British history suggest that neither the Labour Party nor the SLD can do this all by itself. The Conservatives have been the normal party of government since 1918. They have been so because the Liberal-dominated progressive coalition, which seemed to be on the verge of winning hegemony before the first world war, fell apart thereafter; and because the Labour Party never managed to construct a Labour-dominated equivalent. Of course, history may suddenly take a new turning. Kinnock may succeed where MacDonald, Attlee, Gaitskell and Wilson all failed; either Ashdown or Beith may, even now, be carrying Asquith's baton in his knapsack. But it would be foolish to bet much money on it. Both the oppositions are prisoners of their pasts, and neither knows how to escape.



Labour's prison is almost palpable. In ideology and interest it is the child of 'Fordist' mass production, shot through and through with the assumptions, myths and values of the industrial order which is breaking up before our eyes. Almost as damagingly, it is also the foster-child of the British state, stamped indelibly by the experience of seeking and holding power in an increasingly bankrupt system. The evils of this parentage go much deeper than is generally realised. *Pace* most current media comment, Labour's problem is not that it is a socialist party

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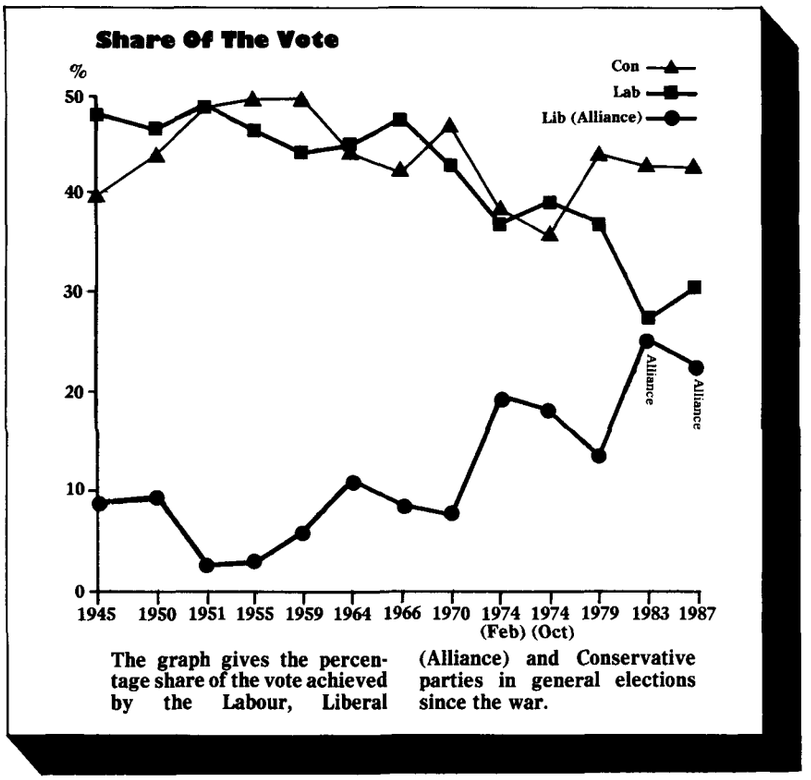

The graph gives the percentage share of the vote achieved by the Labour, Liberal (Alliance) and Conservative parties in general elections since the war.

in a post-socialist era. The socialist tradition is enormously variegated, and some of the strands in it are remarkably well-adapted to the needs of a post-industrial society in the late 20th century.

The real problem is twofold. Ever since Labour became a potential governing party, most Labour socialists – like most Labour social democrats – have taken it for granted that they could achieve their purposes only by taking control of the central British state, and using it to engineer change from the top down. Ever since the foundation of the Labour Representation Committee, moreover, mainstream Labour socialism – again like Labour social democracy – has been mediated through the institutions, values and collective memory of British labourism. It is this fatal combination of centralism and labourism which shackles the Labour Party to the past, and prevents it from addressing the crises to which Thatcherism is a response. So long as that combination lasts, it has no hope of building a new, and appropriately radical, equivalent to the progressive coalition of 1910-1914.

Herein lies the true meaning (and irony) of the current policy review. With enormous perseverance and not a little courage, Kinnock, Hattersley, Gould and the rest are refighting the battle which Hugh Gaitskell lost nearly 30 years ago. They are trying to prove to the world that Labour has jettisoned clause-four socialism, and embraced revisionist social democracy. If they succeed, they will have given the Labour Party of the 1990s an image and stance ideally suited to the 1960s. Indeed, the irony goes even deeper than that. Kinnock and his colleagues can win only by mobilising the block votes of the great unions – in other words, by manipulating the institutions and culture of labourism to repudiate socialism. Yet, in spite of the contrary trumpetings of the media, it is labourism, not socialism, which most alienates the actual or potential anti-Thatcher voters who do not belong to Labour's inward-looking culture, and to whom the party most needs to appeal.

At this point, re-enter the Democrats, the miscalled Centre. In the long term, they are better placed than Labour to spring the trap in which anti-Thatcherite Britain is caught. Their structures are suppler and more open to new currents of thought and feeling. They have no institutional or sentimental ties to the disappearing 'Fordist' order – no sacred rites of proletarian solidarity or misleading memories of the martyred dead – and, apart from a handful of unreconstructed Croslandite revisionists, most of them also have a much smaller ideological stake in it. Indeed, by a strange irony of cultural mutation, their largely pre-'Fordist' ideological inheritance – an amalgam of 19th century popular radicalism and early 20th century social liberalism – speaks more convincingly to the post-'Fordist' late 20th century than does Labour's top-down fabianism.

Much the same is true of their approach to the crisis of ebbing political legitimacy. Though Democrat parliamentarians succumb as easily as Labour ones to the narcissistic *mores* of the Palace of Westminster, the party as a whole is instinctively suspicious of the central state and, as such, willing to be convinced that its institutions are at once corrupt and hollow. It is, after all, the only mainstream United Kingdom party committed to constitutional reform; and although its support for PR is partially dictated by self-interest, PR is nevertheless an indispensable first step towards a citizen democracy. On a different level, the Democrats' natural constituency is growing while Labour's is shrinking. Because of all this, the orthodox Democrat strategy of straining every nerve to come ahead of Labour, so as to be in a position to squeeze the Labour vote, might one day succeed. Indeed, if 1987 had been a repeat of 1983, that strategy might offer the best bet for anti-Thatcherites in 1991.

'It is this fatal combination of centralism and labourism which shackles the Labour Party to the past'

But, of course, 1987 was not a repeat of 1983. Despite Labour boasts to the contrary, the Democrats have not been 'seen off'. They have, however, suffered a serious setback. Far more important than the details of the 1987 result are the forces which produced it. The Democrats' partial downfall in 1987 was due, above all, to the resilience of the Labour vote. One reason, no doubt, was that David Owen went out of his way to demonstrate his antipathy to the Labour Party and his preference for the Conservatives. But it would be a mistake to give much emphasis to that. The real reason was that, except in a handful of inner-city constituencies where Liberal community politicians had managed to build a local base, the Alliance's themes struck no chords with traditional Labour voters. And the reason for that is that Labour's core constituency, though far too small to elect a Labour government, is far too deeply embedded in the Labour culture to vote for a party which seems alien to it: that in the archaic and collapsing world of 'us' versus 'them', only the archaic politics of 'us' and 'them' have resonance. That, of course, is another way of saying that the very factors which confine Labour to its shrinking base also tie its base to it.

So what is to be done? For the time being, at any rate, electoral politicians are trapped in the routines of a majoritarian electoral and party system. Whatever they may think privately, no member of parliament in either opposition party is willing to talk publicly of electoral co-operation. A common agenda, however, is another matter. Oddly enough, there is not much doubt about its outlines. What is needed is a British version of what the American political scientists, Charles Sabel and Michael Piore, have called 'yeoman democracy': a marriage between the communitarian, decentralist, participatory radicalism to which the Democrats are heirs, and the communitarian, decentralist, participatory strands in the socialist inheritance: a marriage, if you like, between Thomas Paine and William Morris. On that, the radicals in the miscalled Centre and the radicals in the miscalled Left could honourably converge. ●

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A Family Tragedy

A Conversation

We are two decades on from the first public recognition of 'baby battering'. The 'Cleveland crisis' is a year old. How much has our understanding advanced of these most private and painful aspects of family life?

The conversation is between Beatrix Campbell and Stephen Sedley. Beatrix has observed closely the detailed investigations of the Cleveland child sex abuse inquiry over the past year. Her book *Unofficial Secrets: Child Sexual Abuse – The Cleveland Case* will be published by Virago at the end of September. Stephen is a QC and chaired the official panel of inquiry into the events surrounding the murder in 1985 of Tyra Henry by her father.

Beatrix Here we are, in the 80s, with a government that's crusadingly familiar, has a big family agenda etc, and yet the times are dominated by these very significant inquiries into the torture, abuse and death of children. I really wonder, why *now*? What are these events telling us?

Stephen One of the problems is that we don't know in any empirical way what the incidence of child abuse has been in past times or even what it is now. We've no yardsticks of comparision to know if it's as bad as it ever was, worse, or even less bad: but this proliferation of reports may not have a great deal to do with an increase in child abuse so much as a growth in media awareness. The response of local authorities to that very harsh media spotlight has been to set up inquiries to show that they *do* care, and if there has to be blame laid, to ensure that the blame is laid by some relatively objective and outside group of people, so the local authority doesn't appear to be simply buck-passing or witch-hunting.

Beatrix That must tell us something about the infrastructure of state agencies involved. We have a welfare state that is massively concerned with the protection of children; and yet these kids – all of whom in the recent spate of cases were subject to surveillance of one kind or another – couldn't be protected, they died.

Stephen It is curious that the typical child death in abuse cases occurs, not out of the blue, but in the hands of a family or in a situation where the child's *known* to be at risk. That doesn't necessarily mean that social services are inept: any institution is going to make mistakes or can do better, particularly an institution like local authority social services which are classically understaffed and overstressed. The problem is that when other professionals make a mistake it's not usually the end of the world. When a social worker responsible for child abuse makes a mistake, it *may* be the end of the world for somebody. The media attention that then comes to bear focuses even more of the anguish, and perhaps represents a distortion of values. But I don't think one wants to fall into the trap of suggesting therefore that the whole business of child abuse is a media creation. There's an equally valid viewpoint that the media, who are highly selective, have latched on through these high-profile cases to something that is actually *deeply* disconcerting, *deeply* dangerous and entrenched in our social fabric.

We're looking at the tip of an iceberg that raises very fundamental questions about who we are: such as the fact that – so far as is known – the whole range of child abuse is predominantly, overwhelmingly committed by males. What's the reason for that? How does it alter our perceptions of where the problems in society of violence, of abuse of power, lie?

Beatrix That palpable fact – of men being the abusers – gets blurred by the way society demands that *women* take responsibility for the care of children. In other words, it's men who've destroyed children, and women who are blamed for failing to protect them. What's extremely important about your report on Tyra Henry, I think, is the way that you map out how social services are mesmerised by the problem of the mother because they can't control her, they can't *make* her protect the child from the man who she is clearly attached to in some ways. They then make the demand of the grandmother.

Stephen All that of course was in the context of what was the local authority's legal responsibility – because the care order was not made either to the mother or the grandmother, but to the council; and the underlying problem remains, that when you've got a child who is known to be at risk, the local state is legally required to step in. It used to mean institutional care, but that – for cost reasons, and also for absolutely genuine emotional and developmental reasons – is now abandoned as a viable expedient except in very extreme cases. Fostering has taken over as the way in which local authorities discharge their duties to look after children at risk. But the really risky situation is the home-on-trial situation, where the child is put back into the context where the risk arose, but under surveillance.

You've probably got to be prepared to take chances like that unless the whole philosophy of childcare is shifted away from the notion that the child has a 'natural' family to which it 'belongs', in which case there would be nothing special about the child's natural mother or grandmother as opposed to any other person who would look after it.

Beatrix What worries me is that any alternative that *isn't* institutionalisation of children barely exists. The only context in which kids grow up is families; and I suppose particularly in metropolitan areas, families without networks. So a child's room for manoeuvre to flee into some other home that's part of its social world, is pretty minimal. Children who're in psychological or physical danger simply don't have any place to run to.

Aside from that there's another problem, which is: *whose* families are going to be deemed unsuitable? I don't know if you remember the case of the surrogate mother in the United States

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who decided that she wanted to keep the child? The would-be parents contested the case and in the end what was at stake was the surrogate mother's reputation. Because the 'parents' were respectable middle-class people, their rights, and what they were going to offer this child, were deemed to be more important than what the surrogate mother could offer.

Stephen The big worry about this is that if there isn't any special reason to think that a child will necessarily be better off with blood relations in whose hands the child has already been abused, then logically there can be no objection to exactly the kind of social engineering that the American case highlighted. In fact this underlies a great deal of adoption/fostering practice: you take a child from a family situation in which it is going to grow up in all probability to be at best feckless and at worst criminal, and you place the child with a family where instead of growing up to be a burglar, it will grow up to be an insurance salesperson! That has enormous social implications, and the anchorage of the child to blood relations is actually one vital brake on that process.

Beatrix Isn't that fascinating? What that describes is a real contradiction whereby we have a critique of the assumption of some necessary correlation between 'good' families and blood: and yet the one guarantee that the children of the impoverished or the ghettoised have of some kind of domestic integrity is that blood tie.

Stephen Yes, and of course it's a contradiction that arises from the heart of Thatcherite ideology, which prioritises the biological unit of the nuclear family, and therefore finds it actually very difficult to simply lift children away from an 'undesirable' context and plonk them into a respectable situation. There's a major tension there. But there's an equal and opposite contradiction in the radical critique of it, because that relies upon the blood relationship, the nuclear family, as its answer to the social engineering solution.

Beatrix That's right. And none of us have come up with the answers to the questions that children themselves might ask about all this. I'm not sure anyway that we know always how to listen to what children say. I think we probably misread as adults much of what they say – we certainly misread children's *silence* and reinterpret that as complicity.

Stephen Yes. The common paradox, both in physical and sexual abuse cases, is that the child is being abused in a context which is nevertheless the only one in which they have love and affection available. And it may be a grievous wrong to the child to simply remove it. But the other irony is that

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Stephen: 'A common paradox is that the child is being abused in the only context in which they have love and affection available'

the possibility of taking not the child but the *abuser* away, except by prison sentence, barely exists. It ought to be possible to exclude the abusing father from the matrimonial home. In America that can be done, in this country it can't.

Beatrix But I wonder whether these abused children *want* their fathers to be removed?

Stephen This is a point at which adult society has to make a judgement as to whether the child is going to be worse off with or without the abusing father under the same roof.

Beatrix What that says to me though is that we have no way of imagining the transformation of these men: so they are surrounded with an almost absolute pessimism. Those that I've talked to who have any experience of working with perpetrators, for instance, say that they're beyond reach really; they're recidivists of the first order, and that abusers re-abuse.

Stephen Trying to cure somebody who's already entrenched in something as grave as child abuse is almost certainly a hopeless exercise. The huge gap in our knowledge is why men – as it mostly is – embark on this: at what point in their lives does the tendency to abuse form? There's anecdotal evidence that in most cases they themselves have been abused...

Beatrix That doesn't explain anything, because women have been abused, and women don't do that to their children. So the question is, why is it that abuse is available to men as some form of dialogue with their own past, and yet not available to women? Clearly in a sense it is culturally endorsed for men.

Stephen That's a powerful point. It suggests that the passive relationship with abuse is at most only a starting point; there's something actively injected into men's social psychology that brings the cycle of abuse round full circle. That may be something to do with what I was trying to articulate earlier about the ethos of maleness and what it triggers in ways that we don't understand.

Beatrix I'm glad it's you saying this, quite honestly, rather than me! I get the impression from lots of women who work in child abuse that it's become legitimate to interrogate expert witnesses in court to unearth their politics and their personal circumstances in a way that I think now makes it very, very difficult for professional women involved in the field to be truthful about who and what they are. There's a sense in which increasingly we're dependent upon someone like you to say 'well, part of the problem here is *men*!' Because it's becoming impossible for women to say that.

Stephen There's certainly an almost perceptible closing of the ranks when child abuse – which we are all against – suddenly starts being brought home *en masse* to men. And that's led to the sort of rigorous questioning which the Cleveland inquiry is going to address. Diagnostic techniques are still predicated partly on acts of faith on the part of experienced paediatricians. Even physical abuse has been classically difficult in some contexts to ascertain: the child who's always turning up at school with bruises, always falling down the stairs, is a well-known syndrome, and yet there's no way of knowing among a dozen children like that how many of them are being knocked about. Such evidence as has been gathered suggests that we're not discovering as a society more than a small fraction of abuse as it occurs. It's only discovered in retrospect from adult ex-victims.

Beatrix And those retrospective surveys suggest that people reorganise their memory: what seems to be the case is that men forget. So the pattern that we have based on these retrospective disclosures shows an almost minimal proportion of boy children being abused. Now if the current work on child abuse is right, then that's not accurate and a much higher proportion of boys are being abused. Why can't men tell?

Stephen The whole culture of maleness is that you don't wince or cry aloud at pain, you learn to cope without crying, you internalise it. When you suppress and internalise something as dramatic and as violative of yourself as serious sexual abuse as a child, it's going to come out sooner or later.

Beatrix Over the last 100 years heterosexual masculinity has almost obsessively campaigned for its ideological construction as the one sexual orientation that *doesn't* yield, that *doesn't* receive, that is not entered. And if that's the culture that men inhabit, then for boys to reveal this thing, not only entails the revelation of pain, but maybe the revelation of something that disturbs completely their sense of what it is to be a masculine man.

Stephen That must be right. And it may do something to explain the violence of the response and then the cyclical recurrence of abuse by the male, where a female who has suffered doesn't react in that aggressive and repetitious way. But this is guesswork. And one of the reasons why so much of one's explanation is speculative is that so little of our information is factual. If you go back to the question of who gets abused, and in what circumstances, you're back with the diagnostic techniques, which rely in one way or another upon consulting-room cross-examination of children. From there the case has to go to the police if there is a possibility of criminal offence – which there frequently is – and there you have the process of criminal investigation coming in with techniques that have nothing to do with diagnosis and everything to do with eliciting the evidence to prove a case that will stand up in court. That means getting absolutely hard evidence and, if possible, a confession, which in turn means confronting the alleged abuser. But even if criminal process *doesn't* follow there's still got to be the civil process of a care order made by the court, and frequently the very same diagnostic techniques used by doctors and social workers to establish that a child is at risk and remove it temporarily, are incapable of standing up in court and so will not produce a care order.

Beatrix What I think has happened in the last year is that not only *can't* they, but they *won't* grant a care order, so that virtually *any* evidence apart from a confession is going to be kicked out of court, because the dominant presumption now is: *this did not happen.* The balance has tilted very much in favour of disbelief.

Stephen Now, where do we go from there as a society? There is a clear parting of the ways. Either you stick to saying that no child is to be taken away from its family unless a case is adequately proved on acceptable evidence to a court which has some measure of expertise in the matter, ie, a juvenile court. Or you say a child's wellbeing is too precious to be subject to the kind of proof that courts of law require; anything that doctors and/or social workers gauge to be an unacceptable level of risk should be enough to have the child removed and placed somewhere safer.

Beatrix That depends on the value and meaning that you attach to certain kinds of evidence.

Stephen You do have to decide as a society whether you want a case proved before you take a child away, or whether suspicion (provided it is reasonably well founded) is sufficient; and the difference between those two is not simply technical. For example, something my panel was concerned about in childcare law was that a local authority which has care of a child, must present a care plan to the court in order to obtain a care order, but can then tear it up – can do anything, completely contradictory to the care plan, without being answerable to the court. Now, our view was, and it's a view that I hold, that the interference with personal liberty that a care order represents – particularly for the child but also for the parents – is a decision of sufficient seriousness that it cannot be left to administrators. It is something that a court – which is open to

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scrutiny on appeal and must operate by certain fixed canons of law – should determine in any developed society.

Beatrix: Can I just interrupt you again there? Because it is an interesting argument this should be a judicial act. We have a judiciary full of all those old boys who sit and adjudicate over something which represents a major challenge to their sex, their power, the lot. Frankly I would rather have an intelligent social worker, much maligned, but who has to operate within a sphere that is intuitive. What's become clear in the last year is that the judiciary's response has been extraordinarily volatile and intuitive.

Stephen What needs looking at is the baggage of ideas and experience that the court brings to this kind of exercise. Something that we never do in this country is to train our judges or magistrates to deal with specialist matters. Industrial tribunals and judges get no training in race or sex discrimination when they have to adjudicate on that, whereas American judges, for example, *are* trained. Child abuse is another classic area in which sensitising the Bench to what they are dealing with is absolutely vital. But it does throw you back to a problem that we were talking about earlier: who is going to give the training? Where is the unitary or homogeneous body of knowledge that can be imparted?

Beatrix That's what worries me about an attempt to provide institutional answers to all this, when we've barely discovered what the problem is. We have a habit of looking at quick solutions, ie, should the courts do this, that, and the other? Fair enough but none of those improvements are going to address the question of what do we do about men? They are not going to address the question of what is sex – or what is sadism? Because the child deaths that we've talked about were more than frustrated parents at the end of their tether. These were cases that involved elaborate damage to the kids, so what produces that? And how do we take responsibility for it all outside the institutional solutions and before it ever gets to court?

The things I remembered best from your report, were about that space between grandmother, mother and local state; and the resourcelessness that this grandma was left with; the enormity of her burden. And it was tragic about the way that report was received really: what people were interested in was the mad, bad man, and who was to blame. Now the same thing, I think, will happen with Cleveland. An inquiry that's lasted half a year, has been reported in a way that if you sat through it you led a double life. The press reports bore no relation to what you heard. For instance it became absolutely apparent to anybody who sat though the inquiry that the 'controversial' diagnosis *wasn't* particularly controversial: it has been around for 100 years and was very familiar to the forensic pathologist. But we all now think that this is a controversial diagnosis which nobody should rely on. We don't *control* the public discourse around child abuse: as a Left, and indeed as a women's movement we have found it very hard to engage with.

Bea: 'I think we probably misread as adults much of what children say. We certainly misread their silence and reinterpret it as complicity'

Stephen It's an example of where the traditional politics of the Left can engage with issues like the balance of power over children: between parents, surrogate parents, local state and courts, and for which it's possible to have a politically-based and politically-oriented critique. Yet on the more fundamental question of why child abuse occurs, classic marxism and classic socialist politics have no more to say probably than Dickens, which is that there are wicked men. It is only the women's movement that has actually started to ask the question: '*How* do men become wicked, *why* are they wicked in those particular ways?' In the social reaches in which judges and many magistrates move these perceptions are not part of the background or cultures, they are not questions they've been brought up to ask. So they are deeply resistant to the questioning critique that the women's movement is advancing. It is much easier to explain away the whole phenomenon in terms of individual wickedness. ●

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NHS's Unhappy Returns

The crisis of the NHS dominated the headlines in the early months of this year. The government response was to initiate a review group under the prime minister which is due to report in September. Here **Gordon Best** offers a view from the Left on the future of the NHS while **John Peet** argues a free-market approach

If any institution still embodies socialist values and stands out against the advance of Thatcherism in Britain in the 1980s, it is the National Health Service. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the government is so intent on reviewing and reforming it.

If so, it is obviously critical for the Left to rise to this challenge and not only to defend the principles which underlie the service, but also to demonstrate how the NHS needs to be reformed in order for these principles to be relevant to the problems and challenges of the 1990s.

To date however, the Left has failed miserably to occupy this terrain and instead has adopted a defensive posture characterised by spirited defences of the NHS accompanied by appeals for more government money and attacks on proposed Tory reforms. And while there are at last some encouraging signs that the Parliamentary Labour Party is preparing to go on the offensive, there has to date been a notable absence of a socialist vision which could be held up and contrasted with proposed Tory reforms.

There are of course a number of factors which have contributed to this state of affairs, but one of the most important must be the reluctance of so many on the Left to admit that the NHS has any problems which cannot be dealt with simply by spending more money. People on the Left who make this rather comforting assumption are quite simply wrong.

More importantly, it is in making this assumption that the Right is allowed to go on the offensive. The Right has correctly diagnosed a number of problems with the NHS and is now busy getting on with proposed changes and reforms intended to address these. Meanwhile, important segments of the Left are standing on the sidelines still denying the reality of this diagnosis.

It is important to face squarely the uncomfortable fact that the NHS has problems and difficulties that cannot be dealt with simply by pumping in more money. It is equally important to recognise that the Right has correctly identified many of these. For example, over the past six months or so, all of the influential right-wing think tanks and a variety of Tory politicians have produced tracts which invariably latch on to one or more of three key problems which, it is claimed, afflict all public sector bureaucracies and the NHS in particular. These are:

- Inefficiency in the use of public resources;
- A lack of responsiveness to the needs and desires of patients;
- A lack of choice for consumers of the service.

The fact that highlighting these problems then gives the Right a perfect platform for extolling the virtues of market forces, should not blind the Left to the fact that there is something in this diagnosis. For example:

- There is incontestable evidence of wide variations in resource use throughout the NHS. What this means is that in different health authorities and hospitals up and down the country, widely differing amounts of resource (eg, pathology tests, nursing time) are devoted to treating or dealing with exactly the same condition. Moreover, these differences persist even when factors such as age, sex and the social class of the patient are taken into account. In these circumstances, not all authorities and hospitals can be making the most efficient use of public resources: the Right's criticism sticks and it cannot be addressed by pumping more money into the system which, quite probably, would find its way into the least efficient authorities.
- Forty years ago the NHS inherited a grossly unequal pattern of service provision. Some parts of the country were relatively well-endowed with hospital and other services, while other areas had few services. Since that time it has been official policy to iron out these inequalities. Recent evidence suggests however that despite the fact that more real resources have been going into the NHS for most of this period, little if any progress has been made in ironing out many of the inequalities. This hardly constitutes evidence to refute the Right's criticism of lack of responsiveness.

There are, unfortunately, many other illustrations which could be cited as evidence that the NHS has problems. Having said that, none of the foregoing should be taken to imply that the NHS does not have considerable strengths nor that there is not a strong case for spending more government money on the service. Rather, it is to suggest that until the Left is clear about how it intends to address problems such as those above and about why its solutions are better than those being put forward by the Right, such claims are unlikely to carry the day.

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In order to move from a diagnosis of the ills of the NHS to a position where the arguments of the Right can be effectively challenged, it is important to be clear about what it is the NHS is trying to achieve. The NHS is not an organisation solely – or perhaps even primarily – concerned with the delivery of health care.

Rather, like health service organisations the world over, the NHS is intended to pursue a number of quite complex objectives simultaneously. For example, the NHS is the largest non-military employer in Europe. As such, it is a key employer within the UK economy. It should therefore strive to be a good employer. Equally, the NHS is in part intended to promote equity: it is an important means through which society can ensure that some of its members who might otherwise not have the choice, gain access to additional social resources. And this is not all: in addition to being in the business of delivering health care, being an employer and being a means of promoting social equity, the NHS is also in the teaching and research 'business', the public health 'business' and so on.

'The NHS has problems and difficulties that cannot be dealt with simply by pumping in more money'

The importance of this observation is that any government, public representative or manager who is charged with the responsibility of running all or any part of the NHS, will find themselves having to weigh up one objective against another in an attempt to arrive at an acceptable balance between all of the NHS's different responsibilities. There have been a number of recent examples of this process at work both at governmental and health authority level.

Over the past two years for instance, government ministers and the DHSS have obliged local health authorities to put their catering, domestic and other support services out to competitive tender.

As a result, many health authorities have managed to save considerable sums on these services and have been able to devote these resources to patient care. The government has hailed these developments as a major success while also claiming that the consequent savings (estimated at more than £50m for the NHS as a whole) provide evidence of previous inefficiencies in the system.

Against these claims are of course those of the NHS trade unions and others who claim that the 'cost' of making these efficiencies has been borne by those employed to provide these services – a group of employees by the way who are not amongst the most privileged in our society.

An economist or experienced manager would say that these kinds of choices are inevitable in the management of large and complex organisations. They would refer to such choices as 'trade-offs', indicating that the pursuit of one objective of the organisation had been sacrificed – or traded-off – against another. In the above example they would probably say that the government had traded-off its pursuit of good employment and equity objectives in favour of its objective of providing more and/or better health care.

A key difference between the Left and the Right in this context is that while the Right knows exactly where it stands on these kinds of trade-off issues, the Left continues to fudge them. Historically, the Labour Party and the Left generally has shown an aversion to the idea of choosing between competing 'goods'. Rather, the Left has always wanted more of everything: more wealth, more equity, more efficiency, more democracy, and so on. And while it is understandable that a political party aspiring to electoral success might well claim that it has a way of getting more of everything, it is at the same time crucial that they have a credible approach to making difficult decisions involving unpalatable trade-offs.

Moreover, it is precisely because the Tories have such an approach, and that the new Right has had such success in wrapping it in candy floss, that Labour and the Left are at risk of losing even more of their natural terrain to the Right.

The centrepiece of the Tory approach to making difficult choices is of course the marketplace. Thus, the vision is one of free, well-informed individuals venturing forth into the marketplace in order – collectively – to make society's unpalatable choices. Individuals as consumers are therefore encouraged to choose freely whether to continue to pay rent for their council house or to purchase it; whether to continue to pay the council for comprehensive education or to 'opt out'; and indeed, to decide freely whether to wait for access to the NHS or to take out private health insurance and jump the queue.

There are two interrelated attractions to this approach to choice:

- The first attraction is that it appears as though the costs of having more benefits (eg, more choice, fewer restrictions) is actually quite modest. For example, a greater reliance on market forces often does give some – often quite vocal – people more choice: if as a result, a non-vocal minority is denied choice, this is but a small price to pay.
- The second attraction is that the market place represents an impersonal means for making such trade-offs. No one individual or group need feel responsible if, as a result of thousands of individual decisions, the market acts so as to disenfranchise or otherwise penalise a minority.

When this philosophy and approach is applied to the reform of the NHS it becomes patently clear that, while the Right may have a credible diagnosis of what is wrong, their prescription for setting things right could not be less credible.

Almost all of the recent literature coming from the Right has the same basic theme: namely, that the NHS has a number of strengths but that like all large public bureaucracies it doesn't give people enough choice; it is dominated by its own inertia and momentum and is therefore unresponsive to change; and it is intrinsically inefficient. To set this right therefore, introduce some market forces – principally competition, but if necessary, other measures such as an end to restrictive professional practices which inhibit the free workings of the market. The implication is that greater choice, greater responsiveness and greater efficiency can be bought at no or very little cost.

The truth of the matter is that evidence from all over the world strongly implies that greater choice, responsiveness and efficiency can only be achieved at a considerable price.[1] The clearest evidence for this can be found in the United States where market forces play a larger role in health care than in any other OECD country.

Here, there can be little doubt that for some segments of the population, there is more choice than that available to the vast majority of the UK population. Equally, many parts of the American health care system are more responsive to changing medical technology, changing consumer expectations and so on, than is the NHS. And it is also true that some parts of the US system are very efficient by comparison with the NHS. There is no point in the Left denying this: but equally there is no point in *not* asking what all of this costs.

The answer to this question is not difficult to come by. There is a segment of the US population – in numbers, about the same size as the population of the UK – which almost certainly has less choice about its health care than do those who are dependent on the NHS. This is about 25% of the US population. For another 25 million or so it would be an open question as to whether their choice was greater or less than the typical NHS user. For all these people, about a third of the population, most of whom are black, hispanic, elderly or chronically ill, the new Right's commitment to greater responsiveness is clearly utterly irrelevant.

The same is true of the claims to costless gains in efficiency. Only about 15% of the US population has access to those parts of the system which could be said to be clearly more efficient than the NHS. But this tends to be a relatively 'healthy' 15% with almost no unemployed, relatively few elderly, and so on. For a significant minority or perhaps even a majority of the US population, the new Right's devotion to market-led efficiency in health care is a chimera.

It is once again necessary to qualify what has been said. Nothing above should be taken to imply that the goals

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of greater choice, responsiveness and efficiency are not worthy ones or that there is not much to be learned from experience in countries such as the United States. Rather, the central points of the foregoing are:

- First, while the Left loses credibility through its reluctance to face up to the hard choices involved in putting a political ideology into practice, the Right exploits this by playing up the benefits associated with market-led change.
- Second, this state of affairs has meant that the Right is on the offensive in the debate about the NHS even though their critique and proposals for reform do not stand up to serious analysis.

The Left must abandon its defensive posture in the debate over the future of the NHS. To do so however means moving beyond simply attacking arguments and proposals coming from the Right.

Rather, it means that the Left must be putting forward alternative proposals reflecting socialist values while at the same time demonstrating how difficult choices will be handled. It is important to recognise that fudging or avoiding these difficult issues of choice not only detracts from the credibility of the Left's position but also endows the Right with credibility by default, ie, the Right's devotion to market 'magic' is not challenged because people cannot see what would be put in its place.

It is now time to move from a mode of critique to one of concrete proposals for managing large-scale change in pursuit of socialist values. It is not difficult to say what socialists want the NHS to be: they want it to be both efficient and effective; they want it to protect and promote equity (or fairness); and they want it to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community. Most socialists also recognise that progress toward these goals will be patchy and will involve difficult choices including sacrificing progress in one area in order to make progress elsewhere.

In the search for an effective means of doing this, the net must be cast wide. In particular, socialists need to recognise that good management and a properly regulated market are simply *means* for achieving agreed ends. Any radical, reforming movement interested in bringing about change must, *ipso facto*, be interested in how that change is to be managed. Good management can bring socialist ends closer. Equally, market forces can be channelled in pursuit of socialist ends: the fact that the Right often uses market forces as a way of shifting costs onto those least able to bear them is no evidence that socialists cannot channel them to other ends.

It is quite clear that the Parliamentary Labour Party, and its allies on the Left, must now address some very difficult questions central to the future of the NHS.

Specifically, the following question should be at the centre of the Left's current agenda: 'if it is possible to harness market-led and other incentives as well as better management to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of the NHS without at the same time undermining its traditional strengths, is this consistent with socialist principles or not?'

If the answer to this question is in the positive then even more difficult questions follow:

- Are there systems of incentives appropriate to the public sector which can be used to encourage developments which will strengthen the NHS? There is, for example, no reason why health authorities should be given 100% of their budgetary allocation even before their performance has been assessed: would it not be appropriate to require health authorities to 'earn' part of their allocation by bringing desired change closer?
- Private medicine is not simply going to go away. Over the medium term the Left must develop policies not only concerned with the delivery of high-quality public services, but also with how best to regulate and control the private sector. Surely there is scope for the NHS to compete aggressively with the private sector by offering its own private medical services in order to increase the revenue coming into the NHS and which can be spent on NHS patients.
- The Labour Party and others on the Left have been noticeably silent in relation to proposals to encourage internal trading within the NHS (ie, trading and competition between NHS authorities and/or hospitals). What is wrong, for example, with one health authority purchasing much-needed services from another in order to shorten its waiting lists? Why not let patients choose between waiting longer for a local service and travelling to a service purchased on their behalf by their health authority?

These are not questions which can be sidestepped if the Left is to regain the initiative in the debate about the NHS. If the problems of the NHS are to be overcome and reforms consistent with socialist principles are to be introduced, then it is essential to spell out how these reforms will differ from and improve upon those being put forward by the Right. The longer it takes the Left to take up these challenges, the greater the chance that the NHS will become another victim of Thatcherism. ●

Gordon Best

1 Many of the assertions concerned with the relative merits of the NHS and health services in the US are based on evidence cited in the Institute of Health Service Management's submission to the prime minister's review of the NHS, particularly volumes 4, 5, IHSM London 1988.

'While the Right may have a credible diagnosis of what is wrong, their prescription for setting things right could not be less credible'

●

Healthy Market

For 40 years the National Health Service has generated more political myths and shibboleths than almost any other British institution. Take the story of its foundation. It is widely believed that Nye Bevan single-handedly established the NHS in the teeth of Tory opposition, and that in doing so he made health care available to the poor for the first time in any country.

In fact, the NHS was clearly foreshadowed in the 1944 white paper presented by the Conservative health minister, Henry Willink – the Tories' 1946 vote against the second reading of Bevan's NHS bill centred on a dispute over the new system's details, not its principles. As for access for the poor, Lloyd George did much to improve that in 1911 – and Bismarck had done even more in imperial Germany.

Ironically, one of the strongest criticisms of today's NHS is precisely that, thanks to its waiting lists, it does not do enough to guarantee equal access for the poor – America's more lavish Medicare and Medicaid programmes are generally reckoned to do better.

Myths have naturally entered the more recent political debate too, with some curious results. Because of Bevan's sacrosanct status within the Labour Party, any suggestion for change to the NHS is immediately resisted by many on the Left. Thus we have seen the unedifying spectacle of hard-bitten socialists siding with doctors and the pharmaceutical industry in resisting efforts to limit the costs of drugs; or, again in alliance with the doctors, fighting the introduction of tougher NHS management.

Equally some Conservatives have a knee-jerk view of the NHS as a 'stalinist' type of institution that should be privatised or broken up rather than improved – so that they find themselves squabbling with that most conservative of bodies, the British Medical Association.

The survival of such odd political beliefs about the NHS makes a thorough review of the system extremely timely. In all its essentials, the NHS has stayed untouched since its birth – a series of ill thought-out reorganisations have done little except generate costs and bad feelings. Yet the past 40 years have seen enormous changes in medicine, in health-care practice, in standards of living and in consumers' relationships with professionals. Like all health-care systems, the NHS has to adapt to these changes if it is not to become outmoded and risk being ousted by some alternative arrangement. Adaptation should, therefore, be at the heart of the government's present review.

Unfortunately, there are signs that the

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'For 40 years the NHS has generated more political myths and shibboleths than almost any other British institution'

review has been shooting off in the wrong direction, though it is not too late to bring it back on to the right track. The first bad sign was the decision that it should be conducted behind Whitehall's closed doors. The government was, quite understandably, keen to avoid the delays of a Royal Commission. But it would have been well-advised to follow the path chosen in New Zealand, whose government set up a group of 'taskforces' to study the health system and recommend changes. The taskforce reports have often been quick, incisive and refreshingly radical.

A more serious objection to the debate surrounding the British review is that it has tended to start at the wrong end – by considering how to finance British health care. The Left insists on tax finance, and wants much more of it. The Right instinctively recoils from more public cash and has instead put forward various wheezes to increase private spending.

Interestingly enough, both sides of the political divide have taken it as axiomatic that more money of some kind should go into health care – though there is little hard evidence to justify this view. Worse still, both sides often ignore what should be the more important issue: not how to pay for health services, but how to organise and monitor their delivery.

Free marketeers might say such issues would best be left to the market. They are wrong, but not completely so. In many ways, health care is indeed just another service – like dry cleaning or car maintenance. Admittedly, it is more vital (literally) than most services. But it also involves substantial externalities that make the well-being of individuals the concern of all – most notably in public health, since untreated and unprevented disease can debilitate or even destroy whole communities. An efficient economy, too, requires a healthy workforce. So government involvement in health services is inevitable.

But that should not mean losing sight of the basic nature of health care: that of a service provided by professionals to consumers – and one whose efficiency and effectiveness both need regular assessment. That means above all that government intervention should go with the grain of the market, not freeze out market forces altogether.

Before considering what that might suggest for reorganising health services, it is worth noting that going with the market need not mean backing away from state finance. In all big industrial countries except America, the public sector pays for the bulk of health care. Even in the United States, it pays for over 40%. Moreover, the evidence of the past 40 years and from other countries does not suggest that Britain's NHS needs a new financing mechanism. Paying through taxation has helped the NHS to keep its administrative costs down; to distribute much of the burden of paying for care away from the sick and poor to the well and rich; to create a healthy presumption of equal access; and, above all, to limit the total amount spent on health care. Countries that have relied on private financing or insurance have found it much harder to achieve any of these things.

Aside from doctrinal views for or against taxation as a means of finance, the only valid criticism of the NHS's financing might be that it has deprived the British health-care industry of resources that it needed. This has become a popular line.

But it begs all those questions about organisation and efficiency that should anyway be the main agenda for the review. Before deciding whether health in Britain has been underfunded, we need to be clear about what the NHS produces, what difference extra cash would have made and whether more could have been achieved with existing resources.

The first striking point in response to these questions is that little is known about the output of the NHS. Partly this is a problem common to all health-care systems: their main objective is presumably to improve health, yet the connection between that and what they actually do is tenuous and debatable at best, and it is also unmeasurable. But ignorance within the NHS goes deeper than this. Little is known about how much individual treatments cost or about which are most effective. No effort is made to measure the productivity of those working within the system. Basic tools of local management – control over pay, budget data, performance assessment – are entirely lacking. And incentives to meet demand efficiently are either absent or perverse: some doctors and hospitals find that it pays more not to work than to work.

Complaints on these lines started over 30 years ago. The recently published official history of the NHS's first decade, which should be compulsory reading for all those involved in the NHS debate, shows this very clearly. So it is not enough to lament the absence of information and incentive in the hope that doctors and managers will do better in future. Instead, a new structure is needed that will force these vested interests to change.

The clue to getting that structure right is to see that the NHS is mistakenly trying to fulfil two roles at once: that of financing agent and that of health-care provider. It is because the two roles are blurred that inefficiencies in delivery persist. A hospital that belongs to its financing health authority does not need to demonstrate cost-effectiveness or high productivity to get resources – because it has no fear that other hospitals might undercut it.

Hospital doctors are in the same position: indeed, if they are inefficient, they may build up a good waiting list that enables them to ask for more cash (and, incidentally, boost their own private practice), they know that there is no risk of patients going elsewhere, because the system does not permit this.

Yet it easily could – if the health-care providers were entirely separated from the financing agents. Hospitals would then act as independent entities that could compete with each other for the cash on offer from the financing authorities. Information about costs, budgeting for doctors, better incentives (and pay) for those working in hospitals would all develop automatically – because without them the hospitals would be unable to beat their competitors. Under the pressure that competition would bring, today's huge differences in costs and in waiting times between health authorities would sharply diminish – and waiting lists with them.

Initially, prices for operations and courses of treatment could be set prospectively on the basis of American-style diagnosis-related groups. But even this detail might disappear once competition between providers was really entrenched.

Objectors to such a proposal make three principal points. One is that patients will always prefer to go to their local hospital because they will not want to travel long distances for treatment. In fact, the distance need not be great: in most parts of England, there are several hospitals within a 25 mile radius. More important, nobody would force patients to move: but the fact that they could if they wished would itself force improvements in hospital efficiency.

A second objection is that choosing between competing providers is impossible in such a technically complex matter as medicine. Better to rely on the professional to act as she or he thinks best, as now. This patronising attitude to consumers is the hallmark of all professionals anxious to preserve their monopolies – and it is increasingly disputed by consumer groups. But in any case, the financing health authorities would, in their role of purchasers, act also as advisers to patients – and they would have as much expertise as the hospitals themselves. In forming their judgements, of course, quality of treatment would be one crucial consideration, indeed more of one than it is now – but price and efficiency would play a role too. The general practitioners who act as gatekeepers controlling entry into the hospital system would also continue to advise patients on their choice.

The third objection centres on the position of those GPs. The gatekeeping function that they carry out must be kept – it is one of the few areas in which the NHS does better than other coun-

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tries' systems. But GPs' theoretical freedom to refer patients to whichever hospital or consultant they like would be constrained in a system under which financing health authorities were acting as intermediaries choosing between competing hospitals.

Paradoxically, it must be said, this could be a good thing. Research in London has shown that many GPs do not know the consultants to whom they refer patients. Even if they do, many are unable to assess either quality or effectiveness. Enlisting health authorities' expertise in the patient referral process would improve matters considerably. It could also provide a means of checking maverick GPs who either over-refer or (more commonly) over-prescribe.

A competitive approach like this has been recommended by New Zealand's taskforce on hospital services. In Britain, the Institute of Health Services Management has recently reported in favour of at least an experiment with 'provider' markets – though they have rather timidly suggested that one version of this could allow health authorities to retain ownership of hospitals. The IHSM conclusion is important, partly because its working group included health authority managers and partly because it was based on substantial academic study of all the evidence both here and abroad – which the Institute has published as a series of working papers.

A more interesting parallel for the idea of provider competition is the recent report by Sir Roy Griffiths into community care of the elderly and mentally sick. Even for this relatively inarticulate group, Sir Roy reckons that social services departments in local authorities could act as buying agencies selecting from competing service providers.

And the money? As already discussed, there are good arguments for sticking with taxation as the basis on which the NHS is run. Even more significant, perhaps, there are few strong arguments for a different system – and the NHS badly needs its masters to remember Lord Falkland's dictum that 'when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.' Conservative suggestions that there should be tax relief for those taking out private health insurance, that people should be able to opt out of the NHS altogether or that the whole system should be run through private insurance all fall against Falkland's rule.

They also involve big deadweight costs – since much of the money would go to the 10% of the population who already have private insurance – more administration, equity and coverage problems and a serious danger that the NHS would lose its much-envied ability to control the total amount spent on health care.

'Hospitals that were independent would also be more imaginative about fund-raising'

This does not mean that there should be not changes at all in NHS finances. Hospitals that were independent would also be more imaginative about fund-raising – for instance, they would tap in to that already-existent big demand for private health care, they would raise cash by getting sponsorship or opening shops and canteens on their premises, and they would find ways of encouraging patients who wanted extra privacy or better meals to pay for them. They would also be free to raise capital in the market to develop their facilities. Measures like these, eased along with some judicious increase in public spending, would help raise the amount Britain spends on health care.

For that spending is probably too low. In 1986, Sweden spent 9.1% of its national income on health care; France spent 8.5%; West Germany spent 8.1%; and the United States spent 11.1%. Britain only spent 6.2% of a relatively smaller national income. But it would be folly to raise that number without changing the delivery system. One leading French economist has said there are three ways of improving a health system: central control, improved incentives and managed competition. Britain has had the first for 40 years. It is time to try the second and third. ● *John Peet*

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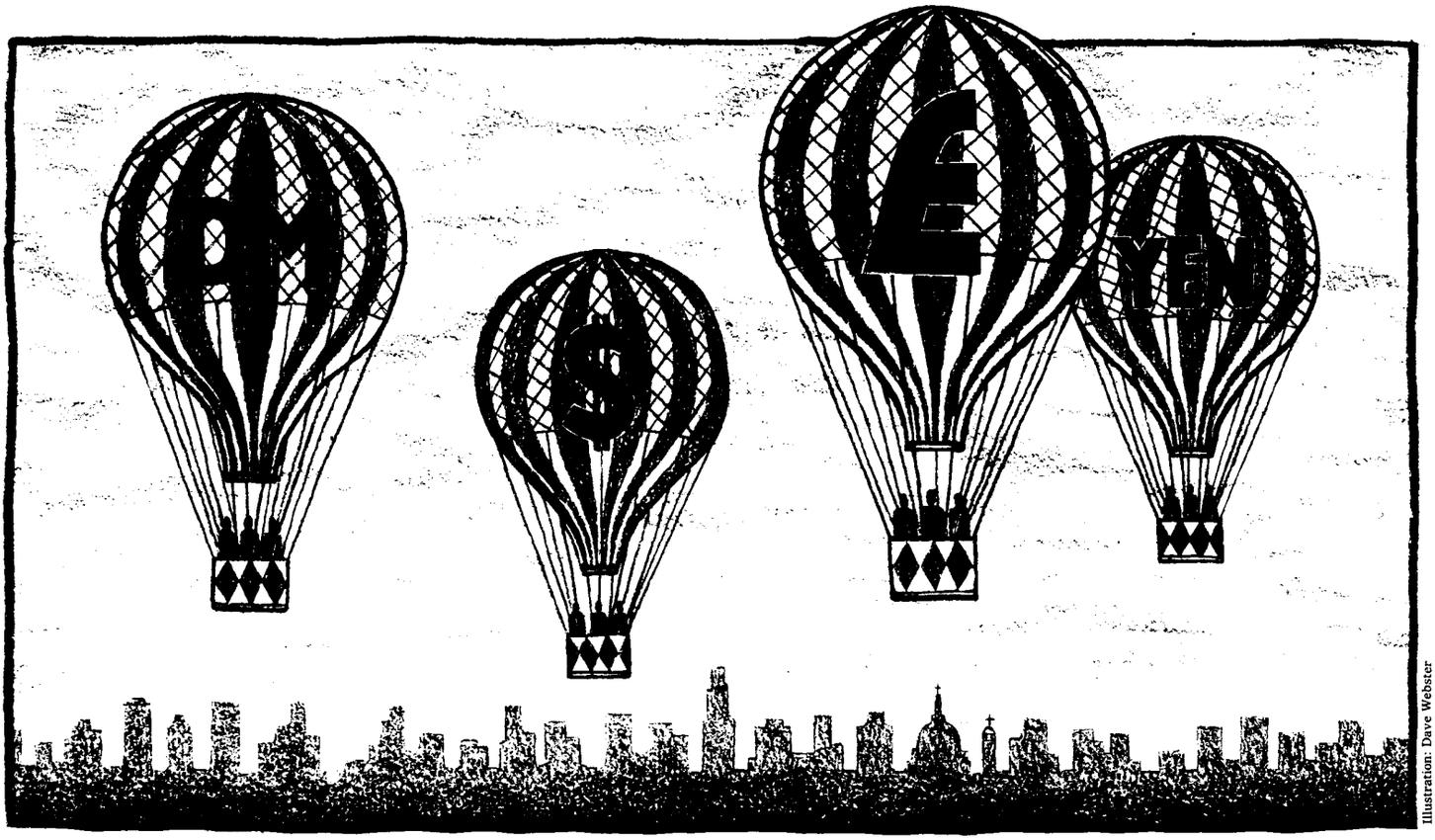

Illustration: Dave Webster

Will The Bubble Burst?

Mrs Thatcher and Mr Lawson have now officially 'made it up'. Mrs Thatcher has, amazingly for her, given in. But things are unlikely to be so simple. **John Wells** argues this one could run and run

Thatcher and Lawson, following their semi-public and unprecedented clash over interest rate and exchange rate policy, appear now to have settled for an uneasy truce. But it may not last because the underlying problems may well refuse to go away. In this article, I examine the key factors underlying the policy clash and what they mean.

The first important issue to focus upon is the factors responsible for the extraordinary strength of the £ sterling in international currency markets in recent months. Although the recent 'bubble' in the pound's value was undoubtedly promoted by some specifically British factors, the pound's recent strength and volatility can only properly be understood within the context of the profound and long-running crisis of confidence in the US $. That is to say, the unwillingness of private sector agents worldwide to increase the share of $-denominated financial assets in their portfolios. At the root of this unwillingness lie:

1 The fact that, over the past few years, international investors have already absorbed vast quantities of $ liabilities (ie, official IOUs of the US government, dished out to the rest of the world in order to finance the US budget and trade deficits); and

2 The fact that, despite the very considerable depreciation of the US $ which has taken place since 1985, very substantial US trade deficits continue to be recorded – thereby creating the expectation of further $ depreciation in order to correct them. Such expectations are reinforced by the knowledge that the US government is unwilling, in the run-up to the November presidential elections, to impose any belt-tightening cuts in either public or private expenditure, which would be the only truly rapid and effective means of cutting both budget and trade deficits. In this situation, everyone knows that US dollar depreciation will have to play a correspondingly more important role in cutting the US external deficit, and this serves to prolong the crisis. Of course, the US $ will, over time, have its ups and downs, but it is this fundamental crisis of confidence which dominates the whole international exchange rate scene at the present time.

Of course, in order to understand the recent 'bubble' of interest in the £ sterling and its rise against the deutsch mark, as well as the dollar, a number of specifically British factors have to be taken into account. First, interest rates in the UK have for a long time been much higher than in Japan and Germany. Moreover, there is undoubtedly a certain amount of enthusiasm in international financial circles for our recently re-elected right-wing government. Intense speculation also contributed to the recent 'bubble' in sterling, as investors jumped on the 'bandwagon' of this particular appreciating asset.

In fact, for a time, all these factors appeared to outweigh the very significant deterioration in UK economic fundamentals which has been taking place in recent months: the 'overheating' of the southern economy and the rapid deterioration on the current account of the balance of payments.

However, in order to appreciate Lawson's position in his row with Thatcher,

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namely his commitment to trying to achieve a greater degree of exchange rate stability, we need to return to the whole issue of $ instability. Lawson's position reflects in part the lessons, learned by governments of all the advanced capitalist countries, from the period of freely-floating international exchange rates (inaugurated in the early 1970s): that a totally hands-off approach to exchange rate deterioration resulted in both considerable volatility and prolonged misalignment. Lawson's commitment to greater exchange rate stability also reflects the widespread belief, in international policy-making circles, that dollar instability played an important role in triggering last October's worldwide stock market crash. Thus, stabilising the key yen-dollar-DM exchange rates is seen as a prophylactic warding-off of global financial instability, especially in the run-up to the US presidential elections.

Thus, Lawson's commitment to trying to stabilise the £ sterling must be seen in the context of his commitment to our trading and financial partners to do all he can to contribute to the stabilisation of the global capitalist economy. Additional factors are his concern to try to maintain the competitiveness of UK production, in the face of a rapidly-deteriorating current account deficit, and his desire to 'shadow' the DM (that is to say, maintain a relatively fixed parity with the DM, as if the UK were a member of the fixed exchange rate European Monetary System – in anticipation of joining it).

Now, during the course of 1987, the Bank of England played quite an active role in trying to arrest the slide of the US dollar. In order to achieve this, the Bank purchased US dollars on international currency markets, and, as a result, the UK's official reserves of gold and foreign currency rose during 1987 from US $22 billion to US $44 billion – their largest ever increase.

Now, there are several aspects to this attempt to stabilise the £ sterling exchange rate which Thatcher can be expected to have been *not* very keen on:

1 She is not overly enthusiastic about market intervention of any sort;

2 The fact that the $ actually depreciated quite considerably during the course of 1987 meant that Britain's foreign currency reserves (which, to a large and growing degree, consisted of US $) suffered quite a considerable paper loss – amounting to about US $2 billion; and finally,

3 Thatcher was concerned that sales of the £ sterling in international currency markets, designed to shore up the dollar, were likely to boost the UK money supply and hence accentuate domestic inflationary pressures. The reasoning behind this is as follows. As the Bank of England pumps £s into international currency markets, foreigners increase their deposits with the UK banking systems and this enables the banks, in turn, to increase their loans to their domestic UK customers. Although it's a controversial point, there is obviously something in it.

Now Lawson, because of his commitment to stabilising world capitalism, has made exchange rate stability his top policy priority, even if the forms of intervention necessary to do this mean taking risks with inflation. Thatcher, on the other hand, has always accorded a much higher priority to inflation-reduction – higher, probably, than any other member of her government. And there is no doubting her intense concern and that of her coterie of personal economic advisors (including, in particular, Professor Brian Griffiths) that the period of sustained expansion, engineered by her Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1982, is now giving rise to acute inflation and balance of payments problems. And that these developments pose a severe threat to the maintenance and sustainability of the boom.

How justified are Thatcher's anxieties concerning inflationary pressures – even if these are largely confined to the southern part of the economy? The answer, it must be said, is: fully justified.

The main manifestations of 'overheating' in the south are: labour market tightening (skill shortages, rapid increases in earnings and increased worker militancy – as at Ford's); housing market problems (acute housing shortages and house price increases, which are way above the national average) and, finally, congestion problems of all kinds (in particular, on the public highway but also in other infrastructural facilities, such as supermarkets). This 'overheating' of the south results from the fact that a disproportionately large share of the total gains in output and employment which have taken place in the British economy as a whole since the recovery began in 1982 have accrued to the south.

The main factors responsible for southern 'overheating' have been:

1 The natural buoyancy of the southern economy, which has experienced sustained growth and prosperity, regardless of which government was in office, since at least the 1930s. This natural buoyancy is due, partly, to the region's close proximity to continental Europe, with its generally dynamic economy, and partly to the concentration of a large number of international service activities (such as airports and tourism) in the south, as well as many of the operations of central government.

2 The relatively more rapid expansion of the south has also been due to the fact that an unusually large share of the total gains in personal income which have been generated in the British economy as a whole since 1979 have accrued to the inhabitants of the south. The reason for this is that, since 1979, the higher a person's earnings, the higher, generally speaking, has been the increase in his/her earnings. This unequal distribution of increases in pre-tax earnings has been accentuated, so far as the distribution of post-tax incomes is concerned, by the fact that the higher a person's income, the larger also has been the reduction in personal taxation since 1979. Since a disproportionate number of the nation's top earners live in the south, this uneven distribution of the gains from personal income growth has been a further factor tending to boost the southern economy.

3 An additional factor stimulating relatively more rapid growth in the south has been that, whereas government expenditure (both central and local), with its large redistribution component, has been strenuously reined in since 1979, private credit has expanded in leaps and bounds, at least since 1982 – and it is this element, fuelling increases in private consumption, which has been the factor stimulating the recovery. Since private credit is usually allocated on the basis: 'To him/her that hath (in terms of income, assets etc) shall more be given', this particular mechanism for allocating claims over resources contains within it a powerful mechanism for generating inequality (certainly compared with a similar volume of state expenditure). This is also a mechanism which favours the south, since, as a region, it contains a majority of the nation's 'have-lots'.

4 The final factor responsible for the exceptionally rapid growth of the south has been the gradual dismantling of government regional policy, as well as the location of several large infrastructure projects (Stansted, the Channel Tunnel, new motorway construction etc) in the south.

'How justified are Thatcher's anxieties concerning inflationary pressures? The answer is: fully justified'

By contrast, the north, although it has clearly been touched by the recovery, continues to experience much lower levels of economic activity and much higher levels of unemployment than the south. The reason for this lies in the huge losses of manufacturing capacity and employment sustained during the Thatcher-induced slump of 1979-81. This was the period when savage cutbacks in domestic demand, induced by severe monetary and fiscal deflation, together with strong appreciation of the £ sterling to record highs, resulted in the loss of roughly 20% of manufacturing capacity. This huge hole in domestic manufacturing supply having been dug, domestic demand was satisfied to an ever-increasing degree by imported manufactures, financed by North Sea oil revenues, the income from capital invested abroad and, now, increasingly by foreign borrowing.

As a result of this loss of capacity, manufacturing output, despite the recent strong recovery in the sector, has only just (fourth quarter of 1987)

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drawn level with the position in May 1979 whereas the output of services in the UK is now 27% higher than in 1987. This exceptionally unbalanced *sectoral* (ie, manufacturing-services) character of Thatcher's economic record and the near stagnation of manufacturing output since 1979, together with ferocious labour-shedding, has been very bad news, indeed, for the northern economy (where the share of manufacturing in both output and employment is still way above the national average). In the south, on the other hand, it is the services which account for a disproportionately large share of both output and employment, and, as a result, the south has been relatively unscathed by the stagnation of manufacturing.

In addition to 'overheating' of the southern economy, the other ominous development which must be causing Thatcher a great deal of heartache is the appearance of large and rapidly increasing deficits on the current account of the balance of payments. What are the factors responsible for this? The principal one is undoubtedly the fact that, in recent years, the growth of domestic spending (ie, consumption plus investment, both public and private) has surged ahead of the growth of domestic output. This is the case whether 1979 or 1982 (the start of the recovery) are taken as our point of reference. Thus, since 1982, domestic spending has increased in real terms by 22%, whilst domestic output has risen by just 17.7%. Comparable figures, using 1979 as base, are: expenditure: +19.2%; output: +15.7%. What these figures mean is that, of the substantial increase in real expenditure which has occurred during the Thatcher era, only about 80% has been sustained on the basis of levels of domestic output. The rest has been satisfied by the rest of the world – and the only way a nation can increase spending at a faster rate than output is via a deterioration in its trade balance. In fact, the deterioration in Britain's balance of trade in goods between 1981 and 1987 amounted to £13 billion, with the manufacturing balance worsening by £11.1 billion.

'This attempt to put a complex, modern economy on "automatic pilot" is proving quite disastrous, the economy is now dangerously out of control'

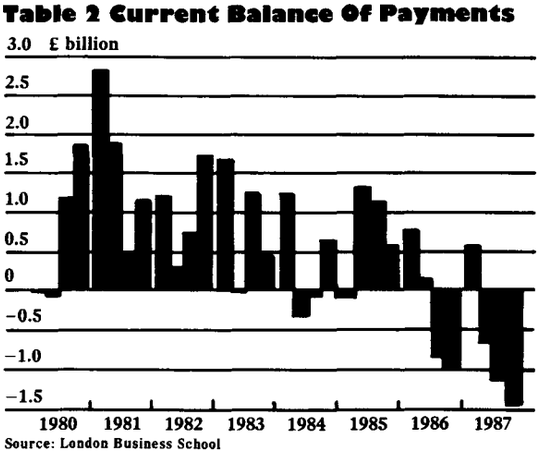
Table 1 UK Balance Of Payments, £ Billion
(at current prices)

	1981	1987
Trade in Goods	+3.4	−9.6
of which (Manufactures)	(+4.6)	(−6.5)
(Fuel)	(+2.7)	(+2.9)
(Food etc.)	(−2.4)	(−3.8)
(Raw Materials)	(−2.0)	(−2.7)
Trade in Commercial Services	+3.7	+5.7
A. Trade in Goods and Commercial Services	+7.1	−3.9
B. Interest, Profits and Dividends	+1.0	+5.7
C. Transfers (official and private)	−1.7	−3.4
Current Account (A+B+C)	+6.3	−1.7

Source: CSO, *Balance of Payments: Pink Book*

Table 1 shows Britain's worsening balance of payments between 1981 and 1987 precipitated by the deteriorating trade balance.

Table 2 Current Balance Of Payments



Source: London Business School

Table 2 shows the huge deterioration in the current account of the balance of payments during the Thatcher-Lawson recovery: the big *surpluses* recorded in 1980/1 being gradually run down and replaced by large *deficits*.

There have been a number of offsetting developments, such as an improvement in the balance in commercial services (eg, banking, insurance etc) and a truly enormous increase in Britain's international investment income (the returns from the greater outflow of capital triggered by the removal of exchange controls in 1979). However, these developments have been nothing like large enough to compensate for the deterioration in the trade balance (see Table 1). Moreover, in addition, the balance in 'transfer payments' (ie, payments made to official institutions, such as the EC) have also recorded increasingly large deficits. Thus, the huge deterioration in Britain's balance of trade in goods, which has taken place during the last few years, has also been reflected in a substantial deterioration in the current account balance. Britain is thus now quite definitely 'living beyond its means', possibly to the tune of about £6 billion (or almost 2% of GDP) during 1987, and this is something that Thatcher has always warned us against.

In order to try to dampen down 'overheating', UK interest rates were gradually raised towards the end of last summer in an attempt to restrict the demand for credit. However, in its attempts to stabilise the domestic economy, the government has continually been hampered by developments in the international economy. Thus, almost immediately after last summer's rise, interest rates were reduced (in late October), as part of the efforts, made by governments of all advanced capitalist countries at the time, to ease liquidity conditions in financial markets in the wake of the global stock market crash. However, as fears concerning the possible deflationary impact of the crash subsided and were replaced by renewed concern about 'overheating', the government once again raised UK interest rates – by 0.5% – on February 1. However, interest rate increases, in a situation of greater integration between national capital markets, simply encouraged capital inflow, thereby driving up the £ sterling exchange rate. Concern with trying to stabilise the £ sterling exchange rate then took priority, causing the government on three occasions to cut interest rates: a 0.5% reduction on March 17, a further cut of 0.5% on April 8 and a further 0.5% cut on May 17 (the day Mrs Thatcher's so-called 'climb-down' in the Commons).

Why has the government found itself in this dilemma? At one level, the answer is quite simple: whereas the demand for credit responds in the *opposite* direction to changes in interest rates (ie, *falling*, though only moderately, when interest rates *rise* and vice-versa), international capital flows and the exchange rate respond *positively* to changes in the rate of interest (ie, flooding in and appreciating, respectively, when interest rates rise). Thus, when demand for sterling is strong, as it has been in

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recent months, then the government is forced to *choose* between policy objectives. *Either* it raises interest rates and dampens down the economy (Thatcher's main objective), in which case the attempt to stabilise the exchange rate is abandoned and the £ sterling appreciates. *Alternatively* (and this is Lawson's ordering of the policy objectives), everything is done by way of interest rate cuts and sales of sterling to stabilise the exchange rate – thereby, assigning counter-inflation policy a distinctly secondary position.

However, this is a dilemma which is entirely of the government's own making. Because of its obsession with free market principles, it has decided to rely exclusively on the price mechanism (in this case, changes in the price of credit – namely, the rate of interest) to curb the credit bonanza, forswearing resort to the whole battery of instruments which governments used to rely on for operating *directly* on the supply of credit (eg, hire purchase controls, the so-called 'corset', special reserve requirements etc).

In fact, the government's decision deliberately to restrict the range of policy instruments it is willing to utilise has drawn it into one of the classic dilemmas of macro-economic management. Namely, that it possesses an insufficient number of policy instruments (just *one*: the rate of interest) in relation to the number of policy objectives (*two*: the demand for credit and the rate of exchange). The government has boxed itself into a corner, but it has only itself to blame.

As a result of the Thatcherites' unquestioning faith in the wholly beneficial outcome of the free play of unrestricted market forces and the associated doctrine of reducing the role of the state to a minimum, the government has relinquished most of the traditional policy instruments for managing the economy. Thus, in its Gadarene rush to deregulate and de-control everything in sight, the government has dismantled regional policy, removed all controls on capital outflows and deregulated the financial sector, whilst this year's budget marks a renewal of faith in the 'balanced budget' doctrine. And even when such instruments are still available (as with direct controls on credit expansion), this government steadfastly chooses not to resort to them. However, this attempt to put a complex, modern economy on a sort of 'automatic pilot' in terms of economic management is proving to be quite disastrous, and the economy is now careering along dangerously out of control.

Of course, the exceptional market strength of sterling during the past few months may well prove to have been just a *temporary* phenomenon. Market sentiment could reverse itself at any time. For example, confidence in the US dollar may revive, or concern about UK economic fundamentals could override the Thatcher 'confidence' factor. The government must, indeed, be praying for a *moderate* easing of demand for the £ sterling for, if that were to happen, its dilemma would certainly be considerably eased. Thus, if demand for the £ sterling were to weaken, the government could both raise interest rates and see the £ sterling fall back to around DM 3.00. In this situation, the government would obviously find it easier to reconcile its conflicting objectives: exchange rate stability (in line with its international obligations) and the maintenance of international competitiveness of UK production, together with the need to restrain the 'overheating' via interest rate increases. Such a *high interest rate/low exchange rate* scenario is certainly possible and it would be a reasonably favourable one for the government. Some heat would be taken out of the spending bonanza, whilst keeping £ sterling at DM 3.00 (a reasonably competitive level for UK manufacturing production) would *limit* the extent of the prospective deterioration in the trade balance. A small movement in the direction of such a high interest rate/low exchange rate scenario did, indeed, take place at the end of May.

However, the government's dilemma may not be resolved quite so easily. It seems almost certain that the fundamental crisis of confidence in the US dollar will persist. The reason for this is that, although there may occasionally be 'good news' from the US (eg, about how dollar devaluation is boosting its export drive), there is also plenty of scope for 'bad news' regarding its slow progress in reducing the twin (budget and trade) deficits.

Thus, although the US dollar is likely to have its ups and downs, upward pressure on the £ sterling may well persist – punctuated by the occasional 'speculative' bubble, as in the past few months.

In this case, the Thatcher government may have no choice but to live with high interest rates (in order to restrain the boom), as well as with an exchange rate above DM 3.00. What are likely to be the effects of such a *high interest rate/high exchange rate* scenario? In some ways, it looks suspiciously like a return to the 'primeval monetarism' of Mark I Thatcherism (1979-81), when the combination of deflationary monetary and fiscal policies together with increasing North Sea oil revenues pushed interest rates and the exchange rate up to such levels that 20% of manufacturing capacity was destroyed. However, spending in the economy is steaming ahead at such a rapid pace – fuelled by the budget giveaways and a credit bonanza, which will probably prove to be relatively insensitive to interest rate increases alone – that we are mostly unlikely to see any immediate return to Mark I Thatcherism.

'There is also a fairly high probability that this dream scenario for the Thatcherites could be rudely shattered'

It looks much more likely, in fact, that we are in for a dose of Reaganomics, not just in respect of the 'supply-side' tax cuts announced in the budget, but also because of what is beginning to look like a re-run of the macro-economics of the second Reagan presidency (1984-86). Thus, domestic expenditure will continue to increase, fuelled by tax cuts and increased credit, even if at a somewhat slower pace than in the past two years. The high exchange rate will have an adverse effect on the competitiveness of UK exports and import-competing sectors but will also exert downward pressure on inflation (because of the competive edge it gives to overseas suppliers). The trade balance will deteriorate further, since domestic spending will continue to race ahead of output (adversely affected by exchange rate appreciation). Additional effects of such a *high interest rate/high exchange rate* scenario are that output growth in manufacturing would lag behind that in services (since a higher share of manufacturing output is internationally-traded and hence subject to the adverse effect of exchange rate appreciation compared with services). The regional implications of this are that the present recovery in the north would be severely checked, if not completely thrown into reverse, whilst expansion in the south will probably continue – though at a slower pace than in recent years.

However, whether we are talking about this (high interest rate, high exchange rate) scenario or the earlier (high interest rate, low exchange rate) scenario, one thing is clear. There is no way the recent pace of the spending boom can be sustained. In fact, there is now quite broad agreement amongst all the various forecasting models that output growth is going to slow and the recent rapid falls in unemployment will be checked.

Of course, continuing southern prosperity and declining inflation are certainly a viable strategy for winning a fourth general election in a row. However, there is also a fairly high probability that this dream scenario for the Thatcherites could be rudely shattered. The £10 billion question is: how long will it be possible to continue attracting overseas finance to sustain huge current account deficits of between 2–4% of GDP? The answer is anybody's guess, but the day of reckoning can surely be no more than 18 months away. If and when this happens, sterling may well suffer the same roller-coaster experience as the US $ (over 1983-88), with a sudden loss of confidence precipitating currency collapse, strong inflationary pressures and the need to adopt really draconian measures to cut back on domestic expenditure. Given the perennial weakness of sterling, the possibility of such an outcome – and certainly well before 1992 – must be rated quite high. ●

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The State After Stalin

The debate in the Soviet Communist Party hots up. Here **Fedor Burlatsky** argues that what is needed is not state socialism but a civil society socialism

The build-up to the 19th conference of the Soviet Communist Party at the end of June has been characterised by an increasingly open struggle between 'reformers' and 'conservatives' at all levels of the party. An article in *Sovyetskaya Rossiya* on March 3 amounted to a manifesto of the conservatives. Its real authorship was unclear, but it clearly had friends and support in high places. The response in *Pravda* on April 5 was written, it is believed, by Alexander Yakovlev, Gorbachev's closest associate. An increasingly important figure in an increasingly open-ended debate is Fedor Burlatsky, a journalist and Gorbachev aide. Here we reprint extracts from his article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (April 20) which takes issue with the notion of state socialism.

What kind of socialism do people need? Such a question, I am sure, will sound seditious to some. But if we think about it, this is the nerve centre of today's discussion. The *Pravda* editorial 'Principles of *Perestroika*' (April 5) touches upon this very pointedly: 'How can we speedily revive the leninist essence of socialism, uncover and rid it of deformations, free it of that which fettered society and prevented the development of socialism to its full potential?'

Lenin made a significant statement after 'war communism': 'We are re-examining all our viewpoints concerning socialism.' Clearly, we now have to engage in a similar task. Firstly, in order to go back to Lenin and overcome Stalin's legacy; and secondly, to state the interests and expectations of our people who have been building socialism over the last 70-odd years. People's experience in the other 14 socialist countries must be taken into account; and a realistic evaluation of the state of competitiveness with the capitalist world in an era of technological revolution must be carried out. It is in these points that, I believe, the essence lies of the new thinking concerning contemporary socialism.

When stating what we see our task to be today, we need to mention the article 'I cannot abandon my principles' in *Sovyetskaya Rossiya* (March 3) which cannot be seen as a mere expression of dogmatism. Rather, and bearing in mind that it was published before the 19th party conference, it can be seen as intending to consolidate the power of conservative forces.

***Glasnost* and people's freedom to** express a range of opinions are inevitably accompanied during the initial period by emotional extremes, destructive repercussions and uncivilised polemics. This is because people do not come from a different planet, but developed under the same difficult conditions underpinned by the cult of personality, the excitement and disillusion of the 60s, and specifically, during a period of stagnation dominated by the legacy of an authoritarian-patriarchal political culture. So what? In politics, as it has been known since ancient times, there aren't only either absolutely positive or absolutely negative manifestations. It is always necessary to make choices in order to come to a decision that will bring better results. And can there still be doubts after we compare two methods: to reveal the problems or to conceal them?

Serious politicians, as well as any other people who deal with this responsibly, understand that if the problem is concealed it is then pushed inside and given a chance to grow to such proportions that it will become impossible to tackle it. But to reveal a problem means to start resolving it. Or is it the case that in the past, during the cult of personality period, planes did not have accidents, trains did not crash, national conflicts did not erupt? Of course they did. But silence fell on all of them, as in a cemetery. And now the country cries over the years and decades of silence. *Glasnost* is the people's mirror which they don't fear because, as the saying goes: 'Don't blame the mirror if your face looks crooked . . .' Yes, the appearance of the society has to change and the mirror won't be blamed for what we see in it.

Conservative forces want to take advantage even of the specific asymmetry which exists between *glasnost* and the few concrete economic results. But the responsibility for the slow speed at which these innovative reforms are moving lies in the hands of these conservative forces. They resort to all means available to them, whether directly or indirectly, to oppose the development of co-operatives, family, collective and brigade contracting, individual efforts, which would not be costly and yet would yield quick results.

But the article in *Sovyetskaya Rossiya* is useful in one sense. It defends Stalin and his legacy in a defiant and straightforward manner. It seems that for the concealed opponents of *perestroika* the expediency would lie in finding a more balanced position, so to speak, to enable them to fight on two fronts – against the extreme anti-stalinists and against the outspoken stalinists. But this hasn't happened: thus demonstrating that there is no alternative to *perestroika*. Brezhnev's stagnant and weak policies do not suit anybody any longer. And this is significant.

It is not difficult to understand why the opponents of *perestroika* have now come out into the open. They realised that *perestroika* is entering into a stage that can become irreversible, as it will turn into people's flesh and blood as well as our social relations. They felt this and decided to put up a fight against it, aiming at finding a base in the most backward social forces.

According to the article in *Sovyetskaya Rossiya*, the main point of discussion is Stalin's place in the history of our country. But this is not at all correct. This question was the reason for the struggle 30 years ago, at the 20th party congress. In essence, a straight answer was given then and it was published in Khrushchev's 'secret' speech. More facts are now becoming available, thanks to work done by the politburo commission of the Soviet Communist Party as well as by different research bodies and which can be found in print and in academic literature. It seems that only the most backward people, those on the periphery of political debate, have only just started to open that chapter of our history.

In fact the main question is now a very different one, which was not given an answer in the 60s. It concerns the system of government which came into

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being during Stalin's period. 'We understood', Gorbachev has said, 'That the party has to show courage and will, and that it has to free itself from certain existing ideas about socialism which constitute the base upon which conditions such as the cult of personality can exist. It has to rid itself of old ideas about how to build socialism, but mainly, to free itself from everything which deformed socialism and constrained people's creative abilities.'

Why and how has a distortion of socialism occurred in our country? To understand this we have to start by acknowledging that since the 20s there have been not just two conceptions of socialism but two models, which in practice competed against each other.

The first one, 'war communism' (1919-21), was strengthened thanks to the cruel civil war, but also to a degree it reflected quasi-anarchist views about the possibility of a 'leap' into communism. In practice it was expressed through orders, force, depriving peasants of their produce and the elimination of the normal exchange of the products of labour.

'State socialism is approaching its end, it is showing its lack of effectiveness in an era of technological revolution'

The second model – the new economic policy or NEP (1921-28) – was based on a commodity economy where different types of enterprise competed with each other – state, co-operative, private – and where peasants freely sold their produce on the market and bought manufactured goods in return. An important aspect of NEP was democracy – inside the party, the trade unions and the soviets as well as at local grassroots level – along with struggle between different trends in the world of culture and artistic creation.

Without entering into a debate about why and how the NEP was overturned I want to point out that this struggle has prevailed all through our history.

The point is that at the very inception of the movement for emancipation there was a struggle between two tendencies: the social democratic one (in our case, Bolshevism) and war communism. The latter was very strong in our party. It commanded a firm base in a backward consciousness and in the authoritarian-patriarchal political culture of the masses. Almost half of the members in the politburo of the party central committee were at one time or another close to 'left communism' ideas. In this context, special attention needs to be given to the work of Bukharin and other leaders who understood the meaning of Lenin's political legacy, and the new approach to socialism. For behind this lies the question of whether there was an alternative to Stalin's methods of industrialisation, collectivisation and the consolidation of the industrial and military might of our country.

It is easy to see how Stalin gradually – at first almost imperceptibly – changed the emphasis and shifted the centre of gravity in respect of Lenin's views. And the direction of these shifts becomes clear. Slowly but steadily it revealed itself – the apotheosis of violence. Revolution, collectivisation of the economy, management of culture and all other changes were for him equated with brutal force. This put a gloomy and grim seal on both the methods for the implementation of collectivisation and industrialisation and on the forms of struggle inside the party: in sum, on the entire process of socialist change. It is not at all surprising that during the early 30s Stalin, in his search for a parallel to his historical period, turned to such figures as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. He wanted to draw from their experiences in order to justify the inevitability of the most gruesome methods resorted to in the name of the country's power.

But the analogy with Peter the Great in fact recoils on Stalin. Peter was not a socialist. He had to pull the country out of backwardness at any price. He was not at all concerned for the well-being and cultural development of the people. In other words, Stalin's understanding of the role of the state in our country was mostly drawn from Russia's past experience and not from marxist sources.

At the 18th party congress in 1939, in the wake of the horrendous bloodletting that took place inside the party and among the people, Stalin announced that the time for the immediate transition to communism had arrived. What exactly he meant by communism was not clearly explained: is it when everybody is well and fully fed or when there is equality for everybody – of what? – of needs, abilities, skills, opportunities? It was left unclear. But it was clearly stated that a whole generation had to be sacrificed to the future 'leap' into communism.

Stalin also simplified the problem of building socialism by equating the process of broad socialisation with state ownership.

At first enterprises were placed under state management, and then, in essence, the state took over the collective farms. This not only affected the economic sphere, but gradually spread over the entire spiritual life, the leadership of the cultural institutions, publishing houses, theatres, schools, universities, hospital and sports. If we also take into account the fact that state officials were not elected but appointed, it then becomes very easy to see the origin of bureaucratic management.

During the post-Stalin period our theory and practice on the whole contained two of Stalin's erroneous ideas: the belief in the absolute power of coercion and the temptation of a 'leap' into communism. Khrushchev was the last leader to still hope that 'the present generation will live under communism'. But until now there has remained unshaken the main stalinist idea of 'state socialism'. I put this concept in inverted commas because of my recognition of its ambiguity, conditionality and inadequacy.

But it was Stalin and not Lenin, who put forward the theory that the state plays the decisive role in the building of socialism. Not the working class and its party, but the state, even if on its own it does not produce anything – no bread, no footwear, no engines or books. These are made by people and the state only regulates – for better or for worse – the process of production.

Though Brezhnev was the first of our leaders not to promise the building of communism in the life of one generation, he still believed in the omnipotence of the state, in its organisational possibilities. When he came to lead the country, he thought that the time had come to overcome Khrushchev's schemes, go back to the previous forms and everything would work just fine. He believed, more than any of our leaders, in the illusion of the 'organised response'. It is not a coincidence that during his rule the number of ministries and departments reached over a 100. And so far the belief in organisational solutions to real problems, which affects almost exclusively the upper echelons of the leadership, has not been abandoned. The task is then, to create new conditions for each producer – be they workers, peasants or the intelligentsia – to stimulate their interest in the results of their labour, and to allow their own initiative.

The article in *Sovyetskaya Rossiya* aims at giving the impression that socialism is going through a deep crisis. But if we have to talk about the elements of this crisis, this relates not to present-day socialism in its entirety, but to one of its forms – 'state socialism'. This form is approaching its end, it is showing its lack of effectiveness in an era of technological revolution. In extreme situations, especially during the civil and the great patriotic wars, centralism and state coercion played their part in the mobilisation of resources and the concentration of forces. But now such a form hampers any move forward in economic, social and cultural life. And it has to change in a slow and well thought-out manner, into a new form which could be called 'public, self-managing socialism'.

This does not mean that the centralised form of state rule will disappear. A total 'dismantling' of the state – the idea is absurd, especially bearing in mind the ever more complex internal and international economic, communication and humanitarian links. But it means that a significant part of its power, functions and prerogatives will have to be ceded to civil society and its institutions. First of all to the labour collectives – at the factories, plants, co-operatives, institutes, unions, as well as to social organisations and other already new and existing institutions, which I am

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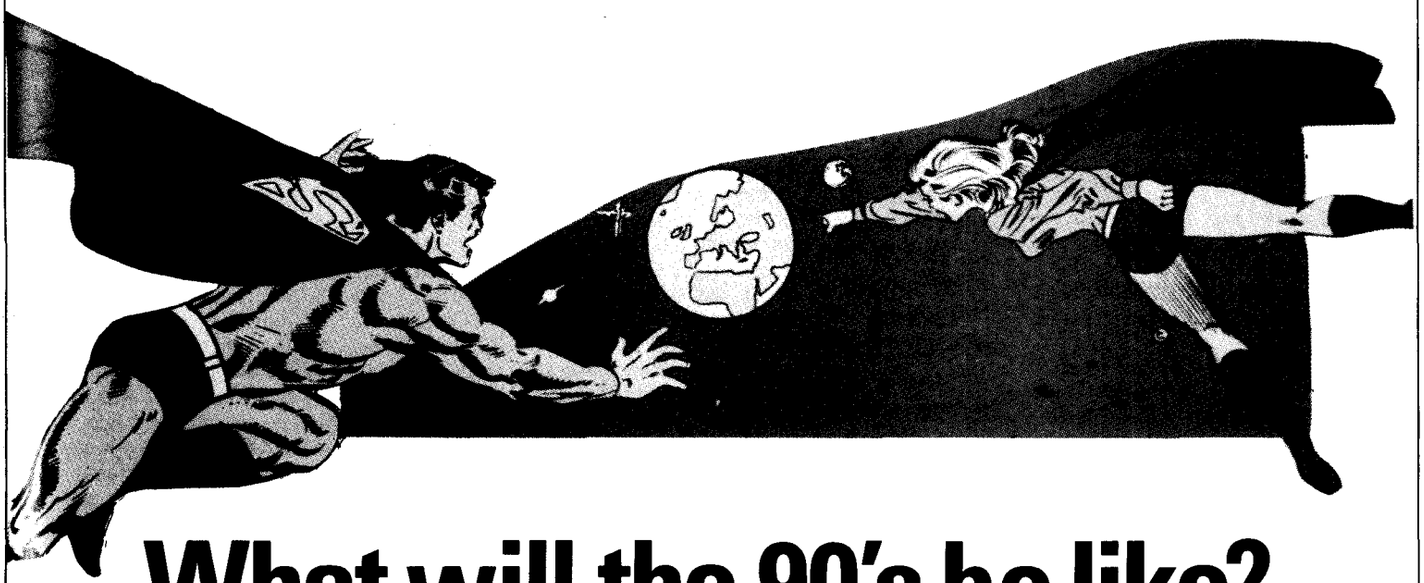

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sure will start arising as *perestroika* moves ahead. Society has to take on much of what the state used to do, as it is choking under the burden of extremely complex tasks and bureaucracy.

Incidentally, capitalism went through different stages of its reconstruction: classical in the 19th century, state and then its state-monopoly form in the early 20th century, and now, due to the technological revolution, it is taking a new form which so far has not shown a clear shape. It still changes its skin and that is why, I am sure, it is taking such a long time to rot. And it has also to be said that in capitalist countries there are not that many dogmatic people, or real idiots who would like to go back to the times of Louis Napoleon, Bismarck or Hitler and Mussolini. This is one of the few advantages of the ideology of pragmatism which looks everywhere in order to get the best results.

Gorbachev stated that socialism is a society of people with initiative. State socialism deserves a severe sentence for its stifling of the initiative of working people. At first individual initiative was sacrified for the sake of the collective, then it was the turn of collective initiative to be sacrificed for the sake of the ruling apparatus. Finally the initiative of those working in that apparatus was also stifled. This apparatus, built in a pyramid-like fashion, concentrated the initiative more and more in the top echelons of power, and finally in the hands of an individual leader and chief. So whatever question the worker wanted to tackle they would have to confront a myriad of hurdles built on orders, rules, instructions and traditions. That is what made any initiative into an offence. Who hasn't experienced this personally?

'Since the 20s there have been not just two conceptions of socialism but two models, which in practice competed against each other'

What is then the qualitatively new model of a more effective, democratic and humanistic socialism? So far we can only see some of its contours.

It is the planned commodity economy based on individual cost-accounting by enterprises and a range of types of social ownership – to raise the form of state property to a form of public ownership by the whole people, and to develop co-operatives, and family and individual enterprises. It is economic competitiveness. It is the development of civil society and the accountability of the state to the society. It is the sharing of power, authority and functions between the party, the state and the social organisations. It is the end of uncivilised forms of bureaucracy and the structuring of state management on the principle of 'the less, the better'. It is the development of self-management, the formation of social opinion as a factor in the political process, the development of elections, the rotation of cadres, professionalism. It is the coexistence of a range of cultural trends, the fostering of a socialist personality, the transcending of a culture based on an authoritarian-patriarchal legacy and the creation of socialist one. All these changes aim at strengthening socialism and public power.

It is quite clear that the development of modern socialism will take a long time – not just a decade. But if not disturbed, it will be decades of inspired effort by our people for the benefit of our homeland and of each Soviet person.

So this is what the manifesto by the opponents of *perestroika* has to confront. It has to face this powerful social movement. The preparations for the forthcoming 19th party conference raise the hope of a transition to resolute action by all the forces of *perestroika*. Drawing from Lenin we can say that a defensive position is the death of revolution. Only a persistent offensive and the constant strengthening of the position of the revolutionary reformers, the unrelenting move towards a change in economic principles and the democratisation of society will permit the isolation of the opponents of renewal and bring on to the side of reform all those who still are wavering. And only then will the present stage of *perestroika* become the starting point for its transition to a new, and higher stage.●

Translated by Anna de Skalon

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The Boy Who Fell To Earth

Michael Jackson's world tour reaches Britain this month. Kobena Mercer assesses his significance

The hardest-working man-child in show business, who brings Pepsi to *perestroika* and gets paid in full. An overweaned child star who refuses to grow up, caught out in a fantasy world where his best friends are llamas and chimpanzees. A modern musician in the expressive Afro-American tradition whose unreal abilities as a singer and performer place him in a class of his own. Which is the real Michael Jackson? Is there a real Michael Jackson?

As a phenomenon of 80s' popular culture, Michael Jackson's stardom has attained a strange kind of hyper-reality. The image is everywhere, on billboards, badges and t-shirts, in adverts, newspapers and magazines: it's hard to believe there might be a real person at the centre of the mythology created around this multi-media mega 'personality'. But then Michael Jackson is also the product of a unique career in the modern entertainment industry which began at age six when he fronted his brothers in the Jackson Five. A family group (like many black American musical acts), the Jacksons were moulded and initially managed by their father Joe, who left his job in a mid-west steel town to promote them into Motown's premier teenybopper group.

I Want You Back, a Jackson Five hit from 1970, has recently been in the charts again, but Michael has moved on from his working-class roots in Gary, Indiana. Some 20 years later, receiving an award at the White House, it's not clear who was upstaging or outperforming whom: the Hollywood actor turned politician or the Boy Who Fell To Earth? Only in America perhaps, but if Jackson's life story (as told in *Moonwalk*, his autobiography) tells us how one black boy entered the American dream, the question is how can he escape when it turns into a nightmare? His next tune for the Pepsi advertising campaign is called *The Price Of Fame* – he should know.

As a key icon of the 80s the focus of mass attention is on Michael Jackson's face. The cute child all got up in gaudy flower-power gear grew up into an image of profoundly post-modern peculiarity. As a star of the second time around, Jackson has redesigned his image, creating a spectacle of sexual and racial ambiguity: is he masculine or feminine, child or adult, black or white? Does it make any difference anyway?

With its mask-like unreality, the changing racial/facial features of this image have generated endless commentary, stories and speculation about his 'true' identity.

It is the ethnic indeterminacy – 'He used to be black', as one 11-year old fan said to me – that has captured the public imagination. It has been said that he's had plastic surgery to make himself look 'more white', although he admits only to a couple of nose jobs and the insertion of a cleft chin: 'I have never had my cheeks altered, nor have I had dermabrasion or a skin peel. It's my face and I know', he protests, pointing out that many white stars have had cosmetic surgery without provoking such fuss. People have tended to respond to the results with bemused fascination or sheer horror. Among some black people the apparent deracination of his identity is interpreted as more than a mere 'sell out', it's seen as an expression of self-negation, a morbid desire to erase his blackness and 'become white'.

Michael Jackson: Rhapsody in black and white

With each recalibration of the visual signs of 'race' (hair, skin, face) his image has acquired more gender instability, more androgyny. Many have noticed more than a passing resemblance to his one-time mentor at Motown – Diana Ross. The element of gender ambiguity

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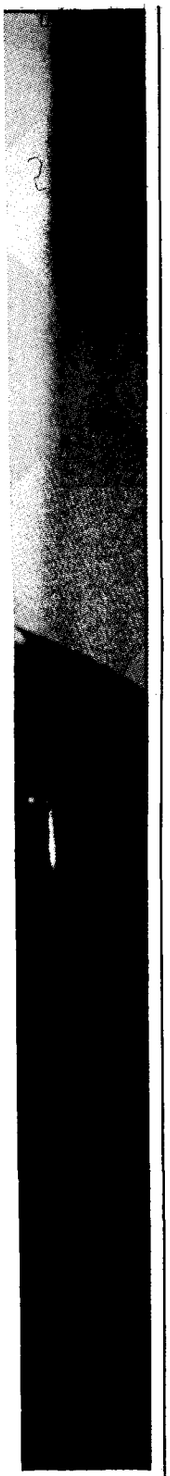

has encouraged gossipy speculation about his private life: is he homosexual or asexual, somehow pre-sexual or maybe post-sexual? The public persona of a non-threatening, neutralised Peter Pan figure is accompanied by the proliferation of quasi-psychiatric interpretations: 'Mad, Bad or Sad?' ask the tabloids. And in his autobiography, Jackson himself exacerbates the mythology, portraying himself as the loneliest boy in the world, trapped in the tragic narrative of the child star, encapsulated in his poignant identification with Liz Taylor, Liza Minelli, Brook Shields and Tatum O'Neal: all born in a trunk, like himself.

Indeed, the show business environment in which he grew up was not that 'normal'. How many teenagers have a fear of being crushed by crowds of screaming fans, how many could wake up on Saturday morning, turn on the tv and say: 'I'm a cartoon!'? Jackson acknowledges that he has a problem about his identity, and yet this was brought on by one of the most ordinary rites of adolescence, acne. 'I became subconsciously scarred by this experience with my skin, I got very shy and my appearance began to depress me.'

Alternatively, the strangeness of Michael Jackson's looks may be evaluated as part of a calculated 'crossover' marketing strategy. 'He's the youngest child I know and the oldest man I know', comments Quincy Jones, producer of *Bad* and *Thriller* – which remains the largest-selling LP in the history of pop. This comment alludes to another Michael Jackson behind the image, a person whose experience has equipped him with astute business sense about the machinations of corporate capital in the world of entertainment. As a perfectionist pop professional Jackson's ambiguous identity can be appreciated as a crafty piece of post-industrial design; the aesthetic reconstruction of his face promoting a sophisticated marketing strategy.

Capitalism has always had a weird relationship to black culture and its musical creativity. Popular entertainment has been dependent upon black innovation, yet black artists have rarely enjoyed the profits of their labour as the mass culture industries have been largely controlled by whites. The racial hierarchy of music markets creates a double bind in which 'authentic' expression is marginalised (yet also exploited as a source of new sounds) while black artists who 'cross over' from minority to mainstream audiences do so only by being a one-off novelty (reggae is still marketed in this way, as Aswad might tell you); fulfilling stereotypical images (Charlie Parker and Jimi Hendrix – the drug-wrecked genius 'type') or by adapting to mainstream norms (Nat King Cole or Diana Ross).

Jackson's star-image incorporates a bit of all three played to the max and inflected with a concern for the visual look of things. Chuck Berry was a crossover hit because, on radio, he 'sounded white'. Michael Jackson, on the other hand, resembles Lena Horne or Dorothy Dandrige as black stars who negotiated their way into the mainstream by 'looking white'. But unlike earlier generations of performers who were ruthlessly ripped off by Tin Pan Alley, he is in control of his own bank balance. Whereas Little Richard screams and shouts, quite rightly, about his overdue royalties, Jackson *owns* the publishing rights on The Beatles' back-catalogue. To borrow a line from his sister Janet's record: 'He's in control', an ideal held dear by many of the British post-punk bands. It was in the early 80s, when video became essential to the remapping of music markets, that Jackson himself designed the corporate marketing campaign for *Thriller*.

As a soundscape, *Thriller* was designed so that every track could be released as a single, and each song appears to be targeted at a discrete generic market: ballads, disco, rock, pop, everything except country and western. But most of all it was the visual that mattered: the three videos – *Billy Jean, Beat It* and *Thriller* – were, he says: 'All part of my original concept for the album. I was determined to present this music as visually as possible'.

In the US each of the videos was played in heavy rotation on MTV and this was important as Jackson was the first black act to get over the channel's unspoken WASP policy.

The real coup however, was the mini-film for *Thriller*, directed by John Landis, which retains a world record for the biggest-selling music video. A pastiche of the B-movie horror genre, Jackson's enactment of the teenage werewolf transformation can be read as an allegory of the cosmetic reconstruction of his face, parodying the 'horrified' reaction at his changing looks.

In the marketing of *Thriller* Jackson became the prototype for a new species of pop star in the 80s – the *designer-hybrid*. By dissolving rigid sexual and racial identities, his reconstituted image could take on a multiplicity of meanings for different markets. The essence of the designer-hybrid is to 'play' with these identities so that the image will be whatever you want it to be.

The designer-hybrid aesthetic brings diverse ethnic audiences together *as consumers* but, unlike 60s bands like Sly And The Family Stone, there is no political ideology except that of multinational capitalism. Rigid ethnic identities, like national boundaries, hinder rather than help the free flow of cultural commodities – what better then than a design aesthetic that dissolves race, ethnicity and gender as fixed identities? This is not so hypothetical once we consider the way Michael Jackson's world tour follows the path of multinational capital. In recent years significant markets have developed in Latin America and South-East Asia. And Jackson's ambiguous star-image with its free-floating identity, can appeal to both.

Children form a large contingent of Jackson's fans and an important market segment as far as singles are concerned. His appeal here may be attributed less to the racial ambiguity than to the larger-than-life, cartoon-like fantasy figure that Jackson embodies. This is not to take a dim view of children consumers but to emphasise that, unlike art school-trained pop professionals, Jackson expresses himself through references to the visual culture of Hollywood. Given his experience, where else would such references come from?

The boy in the bubble assembles his iconography from the Hollyweird world of 'that's entertainment'. The fedora hat that stylises his dazzling 'moonwalk' dance is pure Judy Garland and his book is dedicated to Fred Astaire. Jackson, it seems, has crossed over so far he's struggling to get back into the real world. And this is the real tragedy: his music has become boring and mechanical, his videos repetitive scenarios of masculine anxieties. In the meantime he's on permanent display at Madame Tussaud's and at Disneyworld.

Ultimately Michael Jackson is symptomatic of what has been described as the fragmentation of identity in post-modern consumer culture. On the one hand, there is a creeping smell of decay about his unreal image – a nagging question about how far he can go. On the other, there is something potentially subversive about the ethnic androgyny, something waiting to be politicised. And there is that undeniable talent, the sensual voice and the ethereal dancer, the lithe and graceful body in motion that promises the angelic reconciliation of the sexes. ●

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ARE WE MOVING TO THE RIGHT?

NO CLAUSE 28

THE Prime Minister has been the driving force behind Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, according to senior Govern-

BY GEORGE

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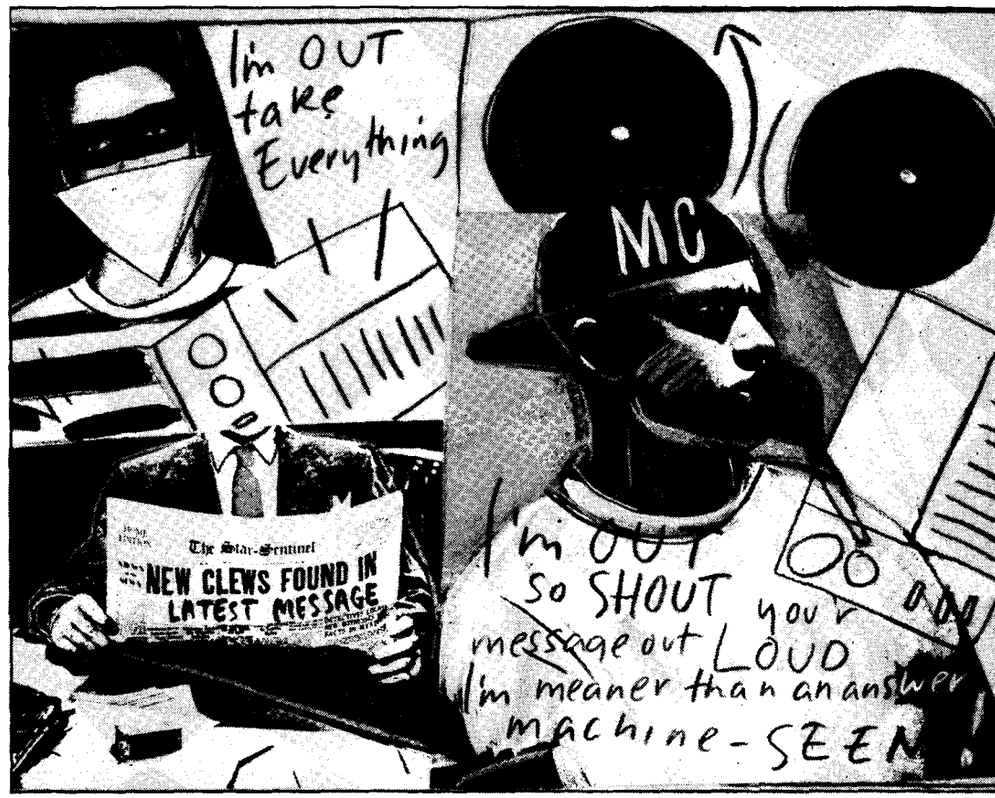
Hello, Bleep

Answerphones can change your life. Stuart Cosgrove argues that they lead to deceit, deception and lies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NEW CLEWS FOUND IN LATEST MESSAGE
I'm OUT
So SHOUT your message out LOUD
I'm meaner than an answer machine - SEEN!

Illustration: Beverley Levy

The day they lowered Kim Philby's dead body into a Moscow grave marked the end of secrecy. It was the day I bought an answerphone, or to be more precise, a Panasonic KX-T24, the domestic microprocessor which turns your life into a maze of deceit, deception and downright lying.

To the uninitiated the answerphone (and the communications culture that determined its growth) is nothing more than a way of staying in touch. You leave home, switch on the machine, a message announces your absence, a tape records your call and at a later date you rewind the tape and jot down the messages. Simple. At least in theory. But answerphones are British Telecom's corporate name for anxiety.

'Begin with the outgoing message', says the instruction manual, as if life was a casual stroll. OK, so you record something simple: 'Hi, Stuart here! Sorry I'm not in, I've gone away for the weekend, can you leave your name and number after the bleep?' Just the kind of message a passing heavy squad wants to hear. It gives them two full days to kick your door in and do a Houdini with your new video recorder.

Now I know all you marxists think all property is theft, but that doesn't theoretically justify why I should donate my portable tv set to the swag brigade. So you try another outgoing message: 'Sorry I'm not in, I've just raced round to the grocers to buy a tin of Kennomeat for the trained bloodhound I keep in the back kitchen. Leave your name and number after the bleep.'

I suppose it's a good message if your friends are roughnecks, but being a bit on the right-on side, it doesn't really fit my needs. So you try another outgoing message: 'Sorry I'm not in. Andrea Dworkin and I have just nipped out to the grocer's to buy some Kennobeans for the cat which I don't restrict to the back kitchen.' Oh fuck this! 'I'm out, leave a message.'

The outgoing message is probably the biggest catastrophe of post-industrial society. It not only leaves you vulnerable to armed robbery, it challenges you to wrestle with the limits of your own ego. Should I go for something simple or hire RUN DMC to a rap which will impress my friends? Should I be myself or sign the message with a personal signature of my deepest desires?

After wrestling with the options I'm a true believer in simplicity. Nothing is worse than being on the wrong side of an outgoing message. Trapped in a phone box on York station with only 10p to keep you communicado, the egotistical friend can be a royal pain. All you want to say is 'my train's late' and you have to listen to Vincent Price's gothic horror routine from the chorus of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* before you hear a message. Inevitably, the 10p retires and you realise that at both ends of your problem is a British Telecom shareholder with a grateful grin.

It was Marshall McLuhan who once said 'The outgoing message is the medium', and he wasn't joking. As media images multiply in that perpetual universe of mass communication, two particular events mark the degeneration of the answerphone. The first was that popular private detective series *The Rockford Files* which gave over 15m people the same original idea. 'Oh! An answerphone. I'll pretend I'm James Garner.' Fortunately, the worst is over, but 1982 will also be marked in my mind by a wave of extremely bad Los Angeles accents: 'Leave your name and number after the tone and I'll get back to you'. It begged the inevitable message: 'My sister has been kidnapped and I've given Starsky and Hutch the job. See you asshole!'

The other media phenomenon is more recent and beloved of the young and hip. It takes its impetus from 'sampling': the hi-tech studio device much loved by DJs and dance music enthusiasts. The cult hit its peak last year when Eric B and Rakim's *Paid In Full* went to Number One in the pop charts. A devastating collage of hard funk, quick rhymes and Yemenite voice-overs, the record provided Britain's answerphone trendies with a new gimmick, the outgoing message as mega-mix: 'Sorry, I'm not in just now but James Brown is here to keep you funky'.

Forget poverty, the outgoing message is society's great divide. We live in a country with two nations: those like me who want to communicate in a simple and effective way, and those like my friend Annie, who wants to be a DJ, an actress and a comedienne in the comfort of her own front room.

If the answerphone was simply a mechanism for receiving and storing messages all would be well.

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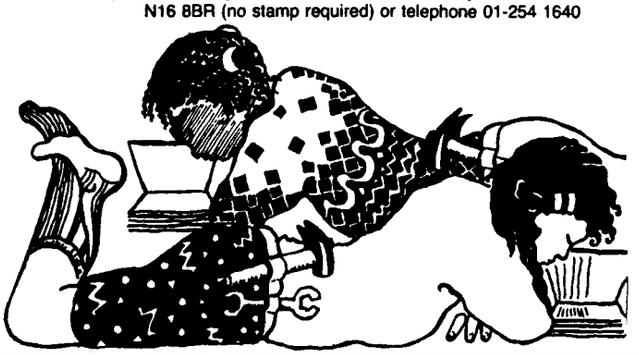

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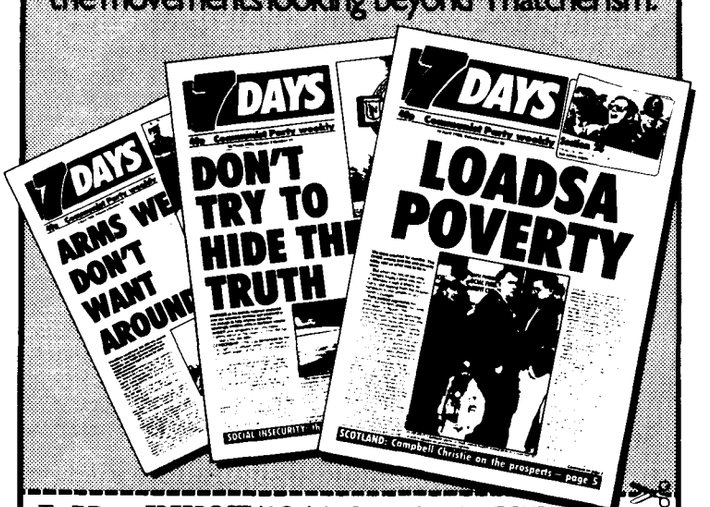

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But the latest models have taken technology to the precipice of madness. The favourite addition is the memory bank, a small-scale microprocessor which stores numbers for your convenience. A great idea in principle, you can programme a series of important numbers, the answerphone will store them and dial any of the numbers automatically on request. Like most people, I keep my friends' numbers, work numbers and a few emergency numbers like doctors and hospitals in a neat little memory bank. Triggering the wrong number can be fatal. There's nothing worse than asking your boss for penicillin – they always think of gonorrhoea and withdraw your monthly bonus.

But what of secrecy and the treacherous corpse of Kim Philby? The answerphone has blown the whistle on keeping secrets: more than any other modern gadget, the answerphone has a built-in Zircon factor, lurking inside every microchip is a tiny Duncan Campbell dying to tell the world about your most intimate secrets.

Imagine the scenario. You are relaxing at home, rubbing toes with the one you love, when the phone rings. Of course, you don't answer, feigned relaxation and barely disguised fear see to that. But the volume control is on and the message blares out like a stadium-rock band: 'Hi. Remember me, we met at Tiffany's. Let's get together again.'

In those moments of complete angst you could rip the phone from the wall and slander the memory of Alexander Graham Bell. The answerphone is nothing more than a domestic lie-detector masquerading as our best friend. When the spiral of communication gets so intense you can't keep secrets it's time to fight back. 'Hi. Jim Rockford here. I think you've got the wrong number so don't bother leaving a message. When you hear the bleep put down the receiver and forget you ever saw me at Tiffany's. Goodbye!' ●

Bates' Tune

Every morning, just when I'm getting ready to leave the house, that bloody thing comes on the radio: that dreadful soppy music and that desperately sincere voice of authority. It's Simon Bates and it's 'Our Tune'. And here he is again telling us another true 'sob story' and here I am again forced to be 10 minutes late because I *have* to listen to the end of it. Simon Bates reveals all to *Suzanne Moore*

Your show, which attracts more than 9m listeners, is famous for 'Our Tune'. How do you see its function?

I see it as being a conduit really. It's easy to knock I know, but it provides an outlet for people to talk without self-pity. It can't solve anything but it does help break down isolation.

You often deal with controversial issues such as Aids, abortion, lesbianism. Do you get a lot of flak for this?

Yes. But the attitude has to be – go with the subject matter. Once you open the floodgates, once you get past 'I met him in a disco . . .' then you can't pull back when someone gay writes in, so long as you don't make value judgements about their politics or sexuality.

What response do you get from your audience?

Surprisingly, according to the figures, my audience is 55% male. And we do get a tremendous response. Recently we did a story about a drug addict who died from Aids and we got a lot of letters saying it was her own fault. That sort of mail I just ignore. But the message of 'Our Tune' is terribly positive: a lot of people are coping with the most appalling circumstances, not necessarily well, but coping.

Some people would say that you were just manipulating people . . .

I can understand that. But I'm not 'Our Tune', I'm just the gob. The British media can't deal with *real* people, it talks about the upper and middle classes. Real people don't fit.

But what do real people get from having their stories told in this way?

Catharsis.

Can you say anything you want on air?

I can honestly say 'yes'. Radio One is very democratic. Don't think that we don't have arguments about policy, about what we are going to include. But never – well maybe two or three times – has someone said: 'You will not discuss this'. There was the time when *Spycatcher* became *sub judice*. At the moment I won't talk about the Gibraltar shootings: for me to comment would be cheapening a very serious issue.

Are you being affected by the current moves towards censorship?

Yes, I am. My management is struggling to keep it off me. The new Broadcasting Standards Council frightens the life out of me. Rees-Mogg for instance, when questioned about six popular tv programmes hadn't even heard of them!

Senior management in the BBC is supportive. One day though I fear I'll come to the office and there will be a storm trooper standing there and all my lot will be gone.

You were in Ethiopia at the time of Live Aid. How did that affect you?

Radically. I actually went mad for a while. I thought I would be able to be cynical but it screwed me up badly – just the sheer obscenity of seeing people keel over. I used to get raging mad for about a year afterwards, just angry and upset all the time at everyone's smugness.

I can handle it more now. I try to spend three weeks a year in a Third World country on specific projects. Ultimately though, I believe poverty is purely political and the political will from both the Left and the Right is just not there today.

Do you sometimes get frustrated by your job on Radio One?

No. It's not my job to be useful. The throwaway culture of the pop world is still not acceptable to some people. I can understand that because it's trivial but I enjoy trivia. People who take life too seriously miss an awful lot. That middle class scorn of anything popular is rife at the BBC. When I was doing *Top of the Pops*, having started off as a journalist and newsreader, the head of archives features came up and said: 'What are you doing here Simon?' I told him I was introducing the programme. 'Oh my poor boy,' he said, 'I'm so sorry.'

What makes you feel optimistic about this country?

The only kind of faith that I have – and I feel relentlessly optimistic about it – is in people's genuine goodwill. I don't think that Clause 28 or abortion matters nearly as much as the genuine turnaround in the idea of the ideal person, from someone who cares to someone who doesn't. What hurts me is that a caring society is even questionable.

Your mother is a subscriber to *Marxism Today*.

Yeah. She's a classic old style socialist. We still disagree about the Spanish civil war. She thinks it was the ultimate defence of freedom that failed. I don't.

What do you think of the Labour Party. Do you like Kinnock?

I'm not a member of any party. Have been but not now. Kinnock is a good conformist but I wouldn't want him leading my party. He's reliable but then so is Thatcher.

Were you charmed by Thatcher when you interviewed her?

No, but then I wasn't charmed by Kinnock either. The only politician that I've been charmed by is Denis Healey. He charmed me off my feet. Margaret frightened me.

So how would you describe your politics?

I hate being categorised. So many people categorise me as a neo-rightwinger because I work for the BBC. Then you say something on the air and you get a whole stack of letters saying: 'How dare you . . . you leftwing bastard'. ●

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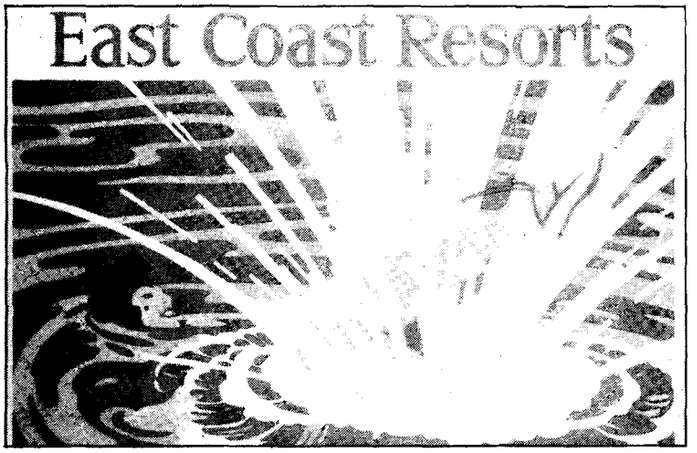

Sun, sand, sea and stereotypes: The golden age of gaiety has given way to decline in the 'Big B' holiday resorts

I Don't Like To Be...

The fortunes of the English seaside resort have reached a low ebb. Geoff Hurd and Celia Lury trace the decline

By 1933 JB Priestley was already becoming nostalgic for a lost Blackpool, one which 'sang about Charlie Brown and the girls with their curly curls'. This great British seaside resort may have been vulgar but, thought Priestley, in its heyday before the first world war it had about it something vital, the feel of an 'alert and virile democracy'. By the time he revisited it in a wet November he felt it had lost that quality of genuine gaiety he remembered and was now a place for the passive and listless. The new, younger working class would look for something more from their leisure in future.

That far Priestley was right, though he was premature in his forecast of decline. The days when Blackpool soaked up 70 special trains a day in season are long gone. And while Blackpool's decline might have been on a grander scale, the same atrophy has gripped all British seaside resorts for the last 30 years.

The seaside resort was established from the mid-19th century as the natural choice for trippers and holiday makers. The high-water mark came in the 1950s, when the principles of mass production and economies of scale were applied to the holiday business, characterised above all by the the rise of Butlin's. But in the 1980s, although firms like Butlin's are making a late attempt to revamp their image, many people no longer see the attraction of sharing the same stretch of British seaside as millions of others.

This change of attitude is partly explained by the development of the European package holiday from the 1950s onwards and the promises it held out of sea, sun, sand and sex. Tourism came in and holidays went out. But in the face of this competition British resorts failed to respond to the economic, social and cultural changes which have produced the typical late 20th century holiday maker. The traditional features of the British seaside are now out of date and unfashionable.

As the attractions of the seaside have diminished during the 1970s and 1980s, the beach has moved in-shore: we now see the familiar theme parks and stately homes strategically or luckily placed on motorways, and gravel pits and reservoirs developed for water sports. Other activities have moved indoors. Solariums and wave machines replicate the sea in the safer, cleaner and closer environments of leisure centres.

If continued decline looks inevitable, there are signs that the seaside is fighting back. Already the Big B resorts – Brighton, Bournemouth and Blackpool – are attempting to swap the traditional season of holiday makers with the seasonal economy of conferences and are making a virtue out of their under-utilised capacity to accommodate and entertain large numbers of people. These resorts are moving the shopping centres and theme parks to the beach. While at the other end of the scale it is still possible, at the smaller resorts, to enjoy the simpler pleasures of an unspoilt coast.

There are still enough of us who go for holidays to the seaside, for market researchers to try and get a picture of how the holiday business is divided up. Your choice of resort will depend on your income, your age and whether or not you have children.

The big resorts and their hinterland of crowded, often run-down caravan sites still offer something like an affordable holiday for the poor. There is little in the way of entertainment and leisure facilities to be found on most of these sites, just the basic accommodation and a beach in walking distance.

For the rest of the holiday market, the choice of a seaside break will depend on the child-hassle factor. For many parents it simply doesn't seem worth the effort or expense to drag young children across Europe if they won't know the difference when they get there and most of the time is spent looking for changing rooms, building sandcastles and sitting glumly in a tent from six o'clock every evening. Anyway, what if they are ill, get sunburnt, seasick, carsick and so on? In the end, it's easier, and cheaper, to go to Bournemouth or the Gower peninsula.

Unlike the mass experience that gave the seaside holiday its character at the beginning of the century – Priestley's virile democracy – today it is part of that general trend towards more discrete and specialised leisure options.

To some extent, the 'new' market segmentations unsurprisingly follow the same principles of division as the social zoning that kept the urban working-class excursionists separate from the middle-class residents and holiday makers in towns like Brighton and Blackpool at the end of the 19th century. What is striking, however, is the importance of parenting and child-raising to choosing a holiday. All over France this summer the cafes and restaurants will be full of English voices. As those in one corner say: 'Isn't it nice to see children being part of the adult world'; in the other they'll be saying: 'Look at that poor child, she's exhausted. Should have been in bed hours ago'. What is the matter with us? ●

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Fading Tans

Bronzed Bridget Smith investigates the darker side of the tanning industry

19th century field workers had superb tans. Meanwhile wealthy landowners sat beneath trees with parasols guarding their translucent palor along with their riches. A century on, the 1960s brought the advent of jet travel and the package holiday. Trips abroad were an expensive affair. Consequently, a bronzed skin was the most blatant proof that you had money enough to buy leisure and an aeroplane ticket. By the early 70s a new inversion of the social divide was formulated: the tanned versus the pale. The privileged sported white vests and hummed *'E Viva Espania'* well into the winter.

In the last decade the opening up of the air travel market and the subsequent reduction in fares has offered tanning to the masses. As a result the number of sunseekers leaving Britain has tripled since 1975. In 1987 26m people checked their suitcases in for a holiday overseas compared with only 8.5m in 1978.

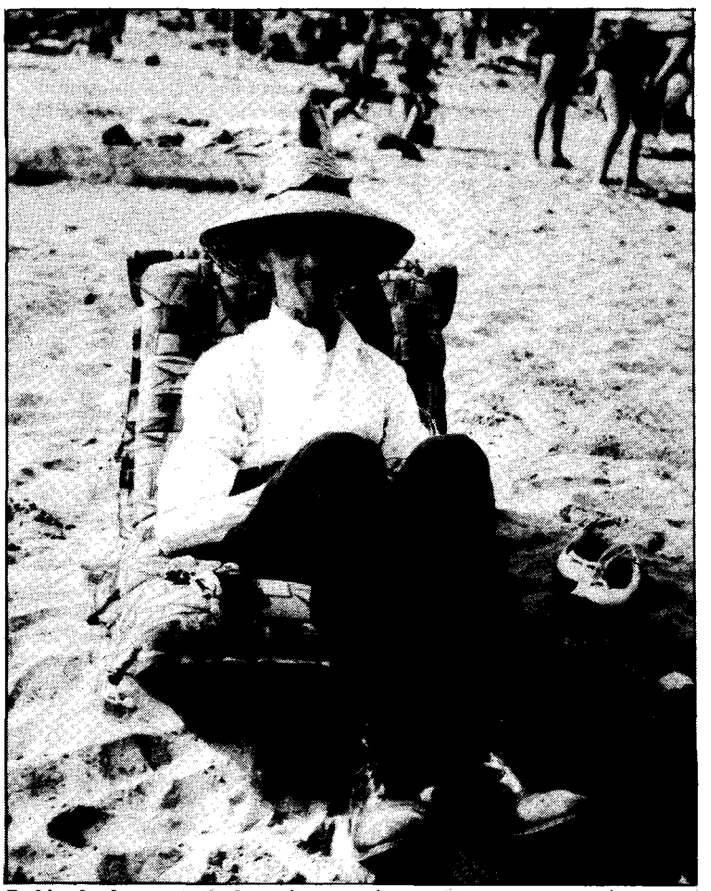
Sun-kissed contradictions

The tan is no longer a symbol of the elite. This summer one reaction has been manifested in the more upmarket magazines. There's been a renaissance of the pale and interesting English Rose. Flower-garden fashions are offset by a pallid skin. Where swimwear and beach attire are shown in *Tatler* and *Vogue*, black models are used, posing in wild native-like stance. These fashion pages represent a nostalgic and a deeply racist notion of natural order. The savage woman pouts and poses at the seashore while the colonial white lady is in the shade sipping iced tea.

As well as the tan's demotion from aristocratic status symbol to something terribly common, it's also been revealed as a fraud. All these years we've been complimenting each other on our healthy glows, but ironically attaining them has been giving us cancer. And while nothing takes the years off more effectively than a sun-kissed body, it actually takes years off the life of the skin.

Old habits die hard though. The English Rose hasn't taken root at all cultural levels. Instead, to keep up with medical discoveries there's been a scientific revolution in the tanning world. The June batch of glossy magazines are packed with warnings and guides to safe tanning. Alongside the black beach-dwellers *Vogue*'s coverage tells us: 'The key word in suncare now is protection, not tanning'.

The 'suncare' market has boomed. Each company has answered the Royal College of Physicians' report of last summer with their own pseudo-scientific information plastered over their clinical packaging. The natural tan has become a myth. Being brown may be associated with rest and leisure, but these days you've got to be prepared to work hard to make the fiction credible. It's become a serious business. After all, your life could depend upon choosing the right SPF (sun protection factor). This could be UK SPFs or USA SPFs. Then there's always the European DIN system... Graphs and bar charts abound, showing results of laboratory tests, proving that a tan is still both desirable and safe with the help of a certain range of products.



Fashion leader sports the latest in protection products

Guerlain of Paris and Aramis have not missed a marketing trick. They've cottoned on to the fact that the scientific approach can be exploited to attract the male consumer. The active and sporty image of toiletries *pour homme* has been around for ages. But now expressions like activator, system, control formulae and even sun protection tools can be utilised. So if the poor *homme* is caught with the dodgy stuff on him, then it's easy to pass it off as something new for the home computer or the Escort XR3i.

Along with the rise of sun tanning lotion this year's cosmetic shelves are loaded with a new chic batch of fake tanning potions. Only now we must call them immediate *bronzers* or *self-tanning* emulsions. Helena Rubenstein has come up with a perfect answer for today's workaholic woman who, to be a bona fide success, must retain a concern for her skin colour. City Bronzer 'develops' a glow instantly, and can be applied between board meetings. When the 'busy lady' manages to grab a couple of days off, they also offer the Weekend Bronzer which guarantees a good tan in 48 hours. We've come to terms with fast food – here's the fast tan.

The tanning process in the late 80s is saturated with confusion and contradictions. The tan remains an emblem of leisure, natural well-being and wealth despite the sophisticated knowledge of the medical, scientific and fake overtones. The irony is that our culture is based on the rejection of a naturally dark skin, yet is obsessed by the process of earning and keeping a deep tan. ●

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Golden Delicious

Fifteen years on from its foundation, Britain's foremost feminist publishing house Virago is celebrating. Brenda Polan peers behind the bookshelf to mark the scale of the achievement in delivering feminism into mainstream publishing

Hubble bubble . . . The trio behind Virago's successful recipe

The first definition of a word in any dictionary is the current one. After that come the lost, abandoned and archaic meanings, the really chewy bits. So my *Concise Collins* tells me that a virago is a loud, violent and ill-tempered woman although she *used* to be a strong or warlike one. Once noble and admirable, the poor dear underwent some dreadful experience which quite wrecked her character. Or did a jaundiced, threatened eye gaze upon her virtue and find it a vice?

When Carmen Callil, Ursula Owen and Harriet Spicer named the Virago Press in 1973 and created a company 'dedicated to publishing books which illuminate and celebrate all aspects of women's lives', they had the archaic definition in mind but they must have enjoyed the symbolism provided by its corruption.

For much of the work of the new publishing house was to be just such salvage. 'Every generation of active feminists', Carmen Callil has written, 'from Mary Wollstonecraft and before, through the "New Women" of the 1890s, to the suffragettes of the early years of this century, to the unsung women who laboured on through the 30s, 40s and 50s, had to start again, had to search through libraries and come, with astonishment, upon the accounts of women who had had the same hopes, problems and experiences. This is because the history of women has been seen as peripheral to the dominant view of the history of the human race. And this, of course, is because women did not have power. They did not run businesses; they did not control the centre of power in any sphere except the home.'

The first Virago Modern Classic, Antonia White's *Frost In May*, was not published until 1978 (the 300th, published this year, is *Miss Marjoribanks* by Mrs Oliphant) but the series is the best-known and most spectacularly successful part of the list. It has a devoted following of persons of both genders, ever enquiring of booksellers about the next spate of titles.

Restoring to women their past literature, affirming a commonality of experience and world-view throughout history was not, however, Virago's first or most immediate aim. The need for a feminist press arose as a result of the growth of the movement whose roots were in the politics of the late 60s, politics which were essentially socialist. It became apparent in the early 70s that feminism needed an arena of its own; the institutions of socialism were just as patriarchal, limiting and oppressive as those of capitalism.

Feminism had to develop its own analysis of history and economics, its own sociology, its own ideology and politics. It needed its own literature and since, while the mainstream publishers might take a flyer on a feminist polemic which was already an American bestseller or a risk on a controversial book by a beautiful and sexy Australian-born Oxford don, none of them was about to take seriously some of the unsensational, academic and exploratory early texts which Virago published.

And published beautifully. Ideology may have come first, but Callil, Owen and Spicer were professional publishers and never discounted the importance of presentation and marketing. No other movement has ever had such a powerful, persuasive and stylish weapon as British feminism has had in Virago. It has been followed into a receptive marketplace by The Women's Press, Onlywomen, Pandora, Sheba and Black Woman Talks and it has made feminist writing not only acceptable to mainstream publishing houses, but positively covetable. 'But, my darling,' exclaimed a male publisher friend the other day, 'feminism's fashionable.'

Maybe. Certainly, Virago set out from the start to reach a general readership of women and men. It was after converts and its well-designed, good-looking books were partly a seductive soft sell. Surely there could be nothing scrappy, half-cock or fanatical about something that glossy, that well-produced, that unstrident. Strident was the word most often used to put down feminists. It has suffered a similar corruption to that undergone by virago. The last thing Virago Press has ever been is loud or harsh though it has certainly been (old usage) urgent.

All publishers are 'passionate' about the books on their lists. At Virago one senses a commitment of a different order; there's a coherence about the whole body of work which one finds nowhere else, a consistency of quality but a rich and wild unpredictability about subject matter which is grist to the greedy mills of the media. The founders recognised the importance of getting written about right from the start. Carmen Callil wrote in *The Bookseller* two years ago that from the business point of view she had three aims: make the books look wonderful, sell them as cheaply as possible and get every inch of publicity possible for each book. Virago PRs sink their charming teeth into your ankle and hang on; and you only mind sometimes.

So there is an awareness of the press in the public's mind which is quite out of proportion to the size of the business, substantial as that is. In its 15th birthday year, Virago has a turnover in excess of £2m and is publishing nearly 100 titles each year. It also owns itself again, having engineered a management buy-out from the Chatto, Cape and Bodley Head group.

Perhaps Virago's greatest achievement lies in the breadth of its vision, the open-mindedness and open-heartedness of its editorial team. It is possible that the women's movement, without Virago and its younger sister-presses, would have remained in the hands of an exclusive sect of theoreticians and academics, eternally alienating those who need to be won with the soft sell of good prose, a certain stylishness, a little passion, a lot of empathy and permission to reach their own understanding of the facts. ●

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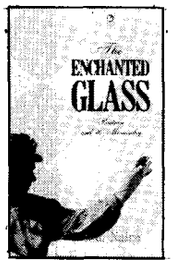


Holy Ghosts

The Enchanted Glass
Tom Nairn, Radius
£8.95 pbk

A third of the population of this island regularly dream about the Queen. They are usually sharing a cup of tea, either at her place or theirs. One wonders how they communicate, since only 3% of us speak the Queen's English.

Three middle-aged ladies in the middle of the Queen's Highway burst into tears of joy when they read of the engagement of Andy and Fergie. Prince Charles' bald patch assumes national, indeed mystic significance... 'Are we all mad?' asks one observer. But if we are, it's 'harmless' – a code word for 'hands off!'

In the first serious analytical study of monarchy for a century, Tom Nairn begins with a brilliant dissection of the mystery: caustic, painfully perceptive, densely textured, with a Scottish bite to it – his account of a Royal Progress through his own East Fife is a masterpiece of black, indeed gothic farce.

This is no mere ornament. Monarchy in its full, rich panoply – the 'peepshow' as Tom Paine called it – so engulfs our culture that the Windsors are Holy Ghosts present at every family table.

It is of crucial significance politically. In a cogent, complex discourse, Tom Nairn mercilessly demolishes the constitutional guru Walter Bagehot with his 'dignified' royalty masking the 'efficient' cabinet and the 'hidden republic' of an oligarchy. He demonstrates as no-one else has done the centrality of this institution to that British state which has been able to stifle and strangle serious dissidence with consummate skill.

It won a decisive victory over republicanism in the struggle against the French Revolution, when a political song, *God Save Great George Our King*, fought its way over rivals in the cockpit of the theatre and the street to become the anthem of that most peculiar entity, the British nation. Today it plays a vital role in holding this ramshackle *Ukania* together, at the price of backwardness – social, political and spiritual.

The British state has never been based on the sovereignty of the people. It has no written constitution or bill of rights; it needs an unwritten political practice to work. It has doled out the vote in carefully rationed packages. It has been an almost perfect specimen of a Gramscian hegemony, knowing how and when to make compromises which leave the inner reality of oligarchical power untouched.

It has ridden challenge after challenge, finally to tame and mute the Labour Party which in its acceptance of this state has degenerated into a licensed clown at the court of the Queen-in-parliament, without even a King Lear to play the Fool to.

To create any kind of civilised life for the people of this island, we have to dismantle this monstrous, gothic structure of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and about-a-half-of-Northern Ireland. We can no longer dodge the central issue of the monarchy. How can we cut free of its tentacles? Tom Nairn correctly foresees a long and painful process of exorcism. He advocates a 'quiet republicanism', a sustained effort to think ourselves out of it.

True, but some action would help. With the Single European Act, the British state will start to become redundant. If Europe is going to struggle painfully to write a constitution for itself, we will get a chance to write ours.

Tom Nairn's quiet republicanism can start us off. There will come a time when we'll have to turn the volume up. ●

Gwyn A Williams

The Long View

Power In The Isthmus
James Dunkerley, Verso
£29.95 hbk

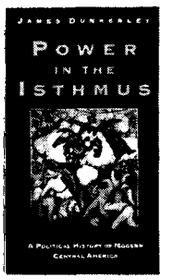
James Dunkerley has produced 'the long book' on Central America, a 700 page political history of the region. He has taken on a monumental task and the result is very impressive.

Those who expected revolution to break out throughout the isthmus following the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in 1979, were as disappointed as those who assumed the Cuban revolution would be replicated in Latin America in 1959.

To be sure, the 'revolutionising of the counter-revolution' played its role, no-one can underestimate the efforts of the Reagan administration to prevent that outcome. But what Dunkerley points to and analyses historically are the many factors indigenous to each country that worked against it. Particularly interesting are his sections on the ethnic issue in Guatemala.

Dunkerley is first and foremost an historian and the book is at its most persuasive and compelling the further it is from the present. I shall look forward to the author's reflections on the 1980s in a decade or so. ●

Jenny Pearce



Out In Print

Thanks to the establishment of a number of feminist and gay publishers over the last 10 years, lesbian and gay fiction has been booming. Virago, the Women's Press, Gay Men's Press, and in the last year Third House have all contributed to the increased range of available titles. Despite the moral backlash, the Aids panic and Section 28, mainstream publishers are also increasingly promoting lesbian and gay fiction.

There has been a remarkable number of best-selling gay novels this year. **The Swimming Pool Library** by Alan Hollinghurst *(Chatto and Windus, £11.95)*, a scorching romp through pre-Aids London. Also from Chatto, **Significant Others** *(£10.95)* by Armistead Maupin, the latest chronicle in the extremely funny *Tales Of The City* series (earlier volumes in *Corgi*). **Sucking Sherbert Lemons** *(Gollancz, £10.95)* is a stunning new novel by Michael Carson about growing up gay and catholic. Witty and entertaining, it also delivers a clear message about the tyranny of religion over sex.

Recent paperback releases include Jeanette Winterson's **The Passion** *(Penguin, £3.95)*, a beautifully-written fantasy stretching all the way across Napoleonic Europe. Certainly a writer to watch. David Leavitt's **The Lost Language of Cranes** *(Penguin, £3.95)*, is a coming out story with an unusual family twist. **Hidden Pictures** *(Methuen £3.95)*, by Meg Wolitzer, is the story of a married woman's coming out. Jean Rule, author of the widely-acclaimed **Desert of the Heart,** has a new novel, **Against the Season** *(Pandora, £4.50)*. A woman reads through her dying sister's diaries disturbing a whole family's history. An extraordinary family is at the heart of Frances Gapper's **Saints and Adventurers** *(Women's Press, £3.95)*. Gapper's wry and witty narrative describes the relationships between three generations of women.

Poetry is the average bookseller's nightmare. Yet two of the most recent publishing successes are anthologies, a collection of lesbian verse, **Naming the Waves** *(Virago, £4.95)* and Marc Almond's, **The Angel Of Death In The Adonis Lounge** *(GMP, £3.95)*. All the signs are that lesbian and gay publishing continues to thrive and that it won't be beaten back by the backlash. ●

Paud Hegarty

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Meetings Bloody Meetings

In a feature article last month Pat Devine urged the Left to look anew at the idea of economic planning. Mike Dietrich and Geoff Hodgson here take issue.

That great socialist Oscar Wilde once remarked that socialism would be impossible because it would take too many meetings. If Pat Devine's proposal (*MT* June) is taken seriously then surely Wilde was correct. Even if 'negotiated co-ordination' is confined to investment decisions, Pat's proposal is a recipe for an overwhelming number of interminable meetings and committees. Whilst some bureaucracy is inevitable even in a democratic society, committees and meetings have their own tyranny just as markets have theirs. They exclude, for example, the housebound and the inarticulate just as markets exclude the poor.

If the rethink on the Left has got us anywhere it should be to reject both an extreme infatuation with the market on the one hand, and the tyranny of statism and the 'democratic' alternatives that masquerade on the far Left. The first lesson of any serious re-evaluation of the Left's objectives must be to accept the inevitability, and indeed the desirability, of both economic and political pluralism. For that reason we reject 'market socialism' if that means no more than subordinate or passive planning by 'remote control'. Where we all agree is that planning still has a primary and strategic role.

However, Pat's model simply is not feasible. It is based on a distinction between allocative 'market exchange', and investment decisions, which under capitalism are supposedly governed by 'market forces'. Pat proposes that the market can be used to generate meaningful prices upon which investment decisions can be based. But this misunderstands the role and function of the market in any real world.

First, in reality, meaningful prices are not static, passive reflectors of the world as it is. They also reflect people's expectations of the future. Once we conceive of the market as a process in historical time, reflecting both the perceived past and the expected future, then Pat's rigid distinction between static, allocative prices and dynamic 'market forces' cannot be sustained.

Second, the market is simply not a black-and-white issue as Pat Devine and the new Right seem to uphold, from different sides. Market relationships will always be necessary. But a market is not an abstract, asocial set of contacts between economic units; rather it is an institution governed by social, legal and cultural rules and conventions. Furthermore, the market itself takes upon the coloration of the overall social system and partly reflects the nature of the society in which it is situated.

Another problem with the 'all power to the committees' proposal is that it would be inept in dealing with technological innovation and change. Would some group with a new idea have to seek approval from each hierarchy in the committee structure before proceeding even with a prototype? Would a factory worker with a new idea on how to organise production be referred to this awesome hierarchy because the innovation involved 'investment', however slight? Surely this is state socialism with an added twist; instead of the Gulag we have the committees.

In one passage Pat actually states that both 'quantitative and qualitative information' can be considered alongside 'the social interest' and 'both system-wide and local knowledge' in the case of *every single industry and every investment decision.* Does this mean discussion on how many bricks are to go into a power station, or how many miles of wire go into the national grid, and of what grade and specification, or whether it is sound to import the copper from a Third World dictatorship?

Illustration: Clifford Harper

On a conservative count a modern industrial economy involves many million products. Even if we consider 'investment' goods only, there are infinite variations in quality, location and specification which have to be taken into account.

However, the problem is not simply one of the amount and complexity of information. Individuals, and committees, have insurmountable limits on the ability to collect and use information. Nor can any current or conceivable computer overcome this problem. Notably, these information problems are not just the result of the anarchy of markets, but of endemic uncertainty and complexity in any modern, large-scale social system.

In our view this informational complexity means that both planning and markets are inevitable. Planning cannot be all embracing, nor is it possible to institute complete planning of all investment in whatever form. Nevertheless, there is a dominant role for planning in setting strategic priorities and thereby affecting and colouring all other decisions throughout the economy. Just as a small part of the nervous system is under the conscious control of the brain, this control is nevertheless crucial for the organism as a whole.

As socialists we should be arguing for an economic strategy based on the importance of economic planning and in addition the use of markets circumscribed by a logic different to that of Thatcherism. Pat Devine's article is important if it reopens this debate, but his formulations are in need of much amendment if they are to inspire a credible economic and political strategy. ●

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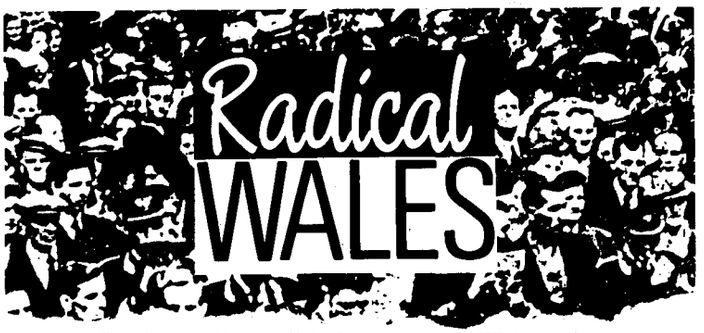

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Contributers

Steve Lohr is a reporter on the *New York Times*.
Patrick Wintour works on *The Guardian*'s political staff.
Cam Matheson has worked for eight years with Turkish political refugees throughout Europe.
Brenda Kirsch is a journalist and a member of the Communist Party executive committee.
Noll Scott is a journalist at *The Guardian*.
Peter Hebblethwaite is best known for his definitive biography of Pope John XXIII (Geoffrey Chapman, 1985).
John Green was a TGWU shop steward at an engineering firm and lives in Swindon.
David Marquand is professor of politics at Salford University and author of *The Unprincipled Society* (Jonathan Cape, 1988).
For details of the participants in **A Family Tragedy**, see page 16.
Gordon Best is the Director of the King's Fund College and advised the Labour Party on health prior to the last election.
John Peet is the health correspondent of *The Economist* and the author of *Healthy Competition* (Centre For Policy Studies, 1987).
John Wells is lecturer in economics at the University of Cambridge and co-author of *De-industrialisation And Foreign Trade*.
Fedor Burlatsky is vice-president of the Soviet Political Sciences Association and a leading protagonist in CPSU debates.
Kobena Mercer has written widely on cultural politics and has contributed to *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1988).
Stuart Cosgrove is a writer and co-director of *Big Star In A Wee Picture*, an independent film company.
Simon Bates is a Radio One DJ.
Suzanne Moore is the editor of *Marxism Today*'s Channel 5.
Bridget Smith is a writer and lectures at Thames Poly.
Geoff Hurd is assistant director of the Gulbenkian Foundation's study of youth cultures.
Celia Lury is writing a book on the cultural industries for RKP.
Brenda Polan is women's editor of *The Guardian*.
Gwyn A Williams is an emeritus professor at the University of Wales, Cardiff; and Vice-Chair of Plaid Cymru.
Paud Hegarty works at Gay's The Word bookshop and is a member of the Communist Party.
Jenny Pearce works for the Latin America Bureau and is author of *Under The Eagle: US Intervention In Central America And The Caribbean*.
Mike Dietrich and **Geoff Hodgson** teach economics at Newcastle Polytechnic. Geoff is the author of *The Democratic Economy*.
Edmund Fawcett is Paris correspondent for *The Economist*.

Additional contributions to this issue:
Channel 5: Chris Granlund
Production: Michael Daniels, Clare Doyle, Chris Evans, Chris Granlund, David Peett, Chris Pate, Paul Webster.

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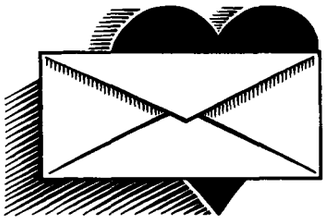

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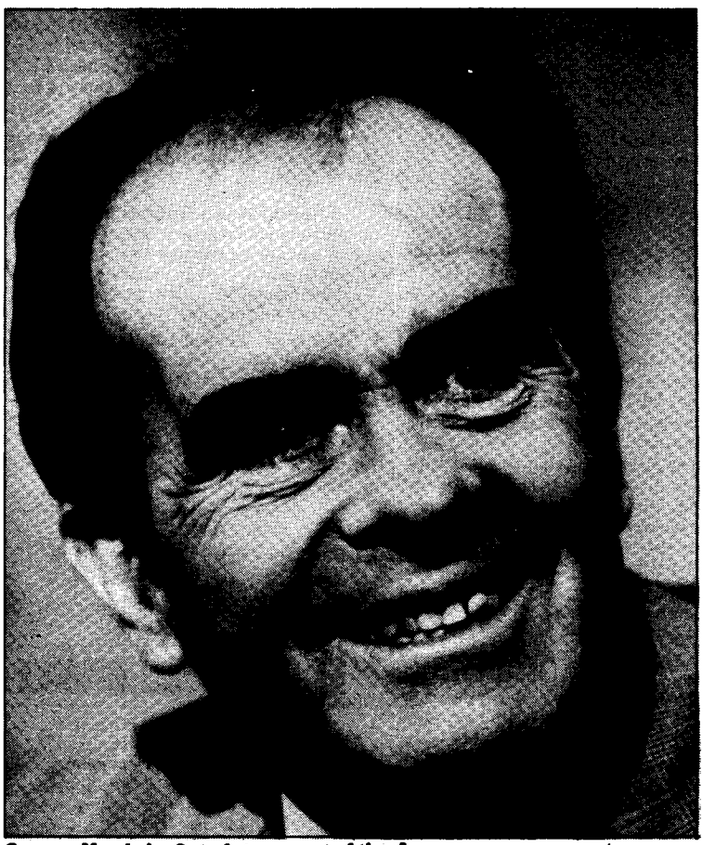

Georges Marchais: Out of step or out of time?

For Georges Marchais, the French Communist leader, the article in *Izvestia* was perhaps the cruellest blow. A week after the Communists' miserable 6.8% score in the first round of France's recent presidential election, Alexander Bovine, an *Izvestia* columnist, made a stinging appraisal of the French party's failures.

France's Communists, Bovine complained, had the wrong sort of policies to attract a modern following. They had failed to keep pace with capitalism's own *perestroika* or restructuring. Worst of all, French communism seemed to be suffering from a hardening of arteries like the one that overtook the Soviet party under Brezhnev.

'So this is the thanks I get for all those years of loyalty,' Marchais might well be grumbling to himself. Yet he cannot really be surprised. In his feisty, irreconcilable way, the 68-year old quarry worker's son often seemed happiest when least in step with events around him.

While most other French politicians, including the odious far-right leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, cultivate smoothness, Marchais has left his edges rough. His black hair, beetling eyebrows and red cheeks give him an unmistakable presence on television. He can be hectoring and charming by turns. 'Rudeness,' President Mitterrand has said of him, 'is his way of saying "good morning".'

Yet despite an image of bull-like purpose, Marchais has never been a very constant strategist. Under his leadership, the French Communist Party has tried many courses. First, eurocommunism, without really being ready to modernise itself or assert its independence from the Soviet party in a way that might have made some alliance with the Italians workable. Second, both alliance with and opposition to the Socialists, neither of which worked out to the Communists' advantage.

Remarkably, Marchais has survived defeat after defeat of his party at the polls. When after a surprisingly rapid rise he became general secretary in 1972, the party was winning a fifth of the vote in national elections. Its fall in the presidential vote since has been almost unbroken: 16% in 1981, 6.8% this year. In the June parliamentary elections the Communists won 11% of the first round vote, just above their score in 1986, which suggests that their slide may at least for the moment have bottomed out.

Party *'renovateurs'* have led numerous revolts against Marchais. Invariably, when the fuss died down, there was Marchais, still in charge at party headquarters on the Place Colonel Fabien. The latest rebel, Pierre Juquin, a former party spokesperson, broke with the party last year and ran for president as an independent leftwinger. After this year's Communist debacle in the presidential elections, even up-to-now loyal communists were asking when Marchais might go. The party's slight recovery in the parliamentary elections, though it boosted morale, did not entirely silence the critics.

The truth is, the question of Marchais' future may have come too late. Marchais was still able in the summer of 1987 to rally an apparently united party against Juquin. At a meeting in Nanterre, Marchais, in a gesture of mockery, put Juquin's name in for nomination as the party's candidate for president. To nobody's surprise, it was unanimously rejected. The chosen candidate, Andre Lajoinie, the party leader in parliament, said afterwards, 'Democracy has spoken'.

In reality, the party was already deeply divided: many members approved of Juquin's efforts to start a real debate about French communism's future, even if they did not necessarily like Juquin. A German history scholar, he seems mild-mannered enough. But until his conversion to reform he was a loyal hardliner. Since the debacle at the polls this year two other *renovateurs*, Claude Poperen and Marcel Rigout, have led many colleagues to argue for reform.

Could French communism have fared better under a different leader? Fifteen years ago, perhaps. But the roots of the party's decline go deep. The crisis of manufacturing industry throughout Europe has sapped the party's working-class base. French intellectuals long ago deserted official communism. Most have now abandoned marxism.

Had Marchais stuck to one strategy, might things have been different? Oddly, Marchais may have had the right instinct in sensing that the French party could never beat the Socialists if it took an Italian, social-democratic route. Yet under his direction, the party showed little consistency. It allowed itself to be smothered by accepting four minor ministries in the first Socialist government from 1981-84. At the same time, the communist-dominated *Confederation Generale du Travail* union failed to stop massive job closures in heavy industry.

Recent changes in French society, on the other hand, seem to have brought out the risks of the other course: a fortress party of opposition, locally entrenched in city councils. Despite their encouraging June score, in next year's local elections French Communists risk losing much of their remaining municipal patronage.

For a party that 15 years ago shared France's left-wing vote about equally with the Socialists it has been an astonishingly rapid collapse. Whoever leads the party in the years ahead will need all their skills to prevent even this dwindled core from breaking up into yet smaller fragments, as happened not long ago to the Communist Party in Spain. ●

Edmund Fawcett

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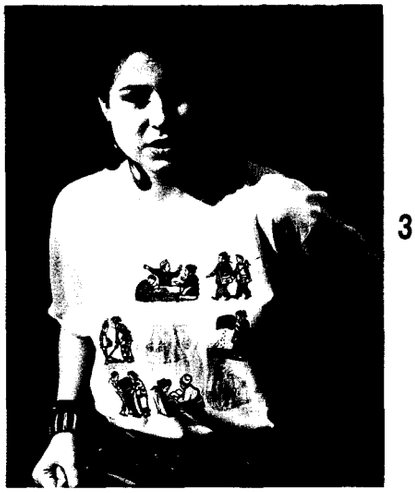

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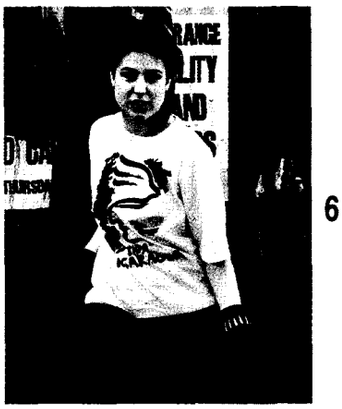

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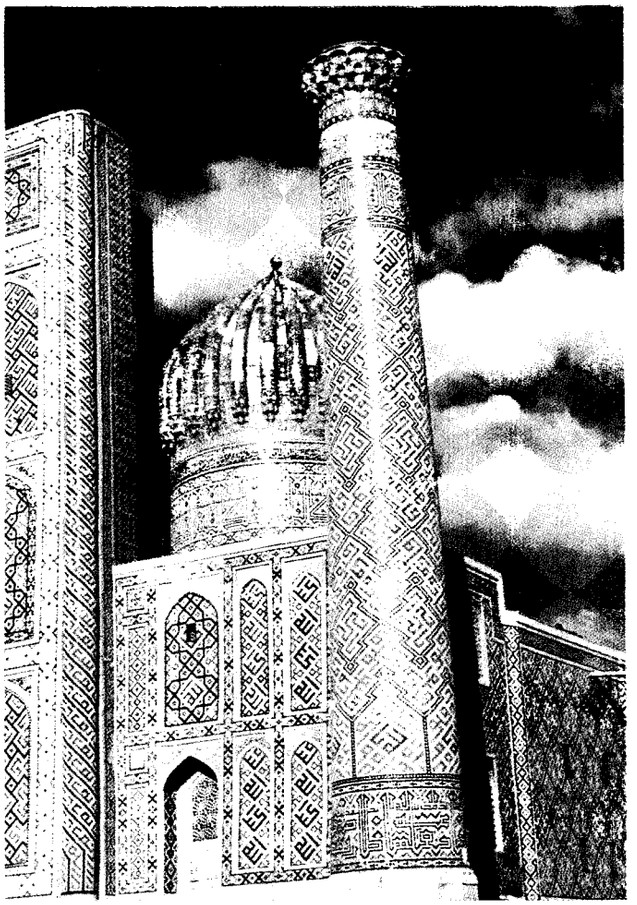

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Late Summer holiday offer! 1st-15th August: 6 days in Havana, including visits to a school, clinic, women's committee and Committee for the Defence of the Revolution. Also 2 day excursion to Pinar del Rio, with the remainder of the holiday at Playas del Este – where the day can be spent on some of Cuba's best beaches and the evenings in Havana. £745.00

Coach travel to Paris for the left-wing festival, 9th-12th September. Includes optional excursions to Versailles and Reims on the homeward journey, with a champagne tasting at the Pommery cellars. £80,00.

Group and individual holidays in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Trinidad and the nearby beaches of the Playas del Este and Varadero. Specialist groups include a Cuban song and dance festival in October and a Latin American film festival in December. New low fares via Shannon.

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